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NEPAL: Final agreement on management of combatants and weapons



Photo: Sagar Shrestha/IRIN

Time to put down the gun

KATHMANDU, 29 November 2006 (IRIN) - Maoist rebels and Nepal's interim government signed a formal agreement on the management of both sides' arms and weapons on Tuesday night.

"We have been successful in reaching an agreement on a very crucial issue of our peace agreement," said home minister and key government negotiator Krishna Prasad Sitaula following the signing.

The agreement came nearly three weeks after the main peace pact was inked between the rebels and government ending a decade-long armed conflict in which an estimated 14,000 Nepalese died.

"This agreement will lead towards a lasting political situation," said Krishna Mahara, rebel spokesperson and negotiator.

The key provisions of the "Agreement on Monitoring the Management of Arms and Armies" include the cantonment of Maoist soldiers and their weapons at designated sites. The government will also confine its soldiers to barracks and they will be used only for providing security for prominent officials, and for patrolling national parks, borders, banks, airports and power generation sites.

United Nations monitoring team members will have unlimited access throughout the process to monitor both Maoist cantonment camps and army barracks to ensure the agreement is being implemented.

The agreement also holds both sides accountable for identifying and assisting child soldiers and support staff. The rebels have thousands of children working for them, according to NGOs working for children's rights.

Important for civilians caught up in the conflict, both armies will also cooperate in identifying landmines and booby traps - still a major threat to the lives of many people in rural areas. All landmines and booby traps have to be dealt with in two months, although experts suggest making the country mine-free could take many years and significant resources.

Rebel officers and soldiers are due to be integrated into a new national security force at some point in the future. Their eligibility will be decided by a special committee formed from a new interim council of ministers to be created in December.

The Joint Monitoring Coordination Committee (JMCC) composed of the UN, the government and Maoists will be the main coordinating body for monitoring arms and armies, Sitaula said.

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