

URGENT ACTION

INDIAN ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS HELD

Two human rights defenders and environmental rights campaigners, Ramesh Agrawal and Dr Harihar Patel, were arrested on false charges on 28 May in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh and denied release on bail. Ramesh Agrawal is now being held chained to his bed at hospital where he is undergoing treatment for hypertension.

Ramesh Agrawal works for the environmental rights organization Jan Chetna, and **Dr Harihar Patel**, who practices indigenous medicine, were arrested on 28 May in Raigarh town, Chhattisgarh. They have been actively campaigning against the pollution caused by existing industrial projects and the potential negative environmental impact of proposed industrial projects in central Chhattisgarh, and have raised their concerns in mandatory consultations conducted by the authorities.

The two activists are also at the forefront of the campaign for the public disclosure of information relating to these projects which affect local Adivasi (Indigenous) communities and for ensuring that these are available to the communities. Their arrest, Amnesty International believes, is intended to stop their peaceful campaign activities.

The state police have charged the two men with “circulating defamatory material”, “disrupting public order” and “causing alarm and panic among the public” at a mandatory public consultation, held by the state pollution board at Tamnar village on 8 May 2010. The consultation related to the expansion proposal of a coal-fired thermal power plant run by the private firm Jindal Steel and Power. Concerns were expressed that the expansion would lead to the forcible acquisition of lands from the surrounding local communities by the authorities. The two activists had objected to the proposal and cited an official inspection report which stated that the expansion began before the mandatory clearances were given. Ramesh Agrawal also successfully petitioned India’s Ministry of Environment and Forests to temporarily suspend the terms of reference for the expansion. Following a complaint relating to the delay, the state authorities decided to arrest the two activists.

The two activists were sent to Raigarh prison until 3 June, and a local court rejected their appeals for release on bail on 2 June. Ramesh Agrawal, who complained of hypertension, was taken for treatment at a government-run hospital where he is being kept chained to his bed which amounts to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in English or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to stop the illegal chaining of Ramesh Agrawal at the Raigarh hospital where he is being treated;
- Calling on them to drop the false charges against Ramesh Agrawal and Dr Harihar Patel and release them immediately;
- Asking them to take all necessary measures to guarantee that human rights defenders and environmental activists in Chhattisgarh are able to carry out their legitimate and peaceful human rights activities without fear of harassment and intimidation.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 14 JULY 2011 TO:

Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh

Dr Raman Singh

Chief Minister’s Niwas

Raipur 492001, India

Email: cm@cg.nic.in

Salutation: Dear Chief Minister

Minister of Environment and Forests

Jairam Ramesh

Paryavaran Bhavan

Lodhi Road, New Delhi 110003, India

Email: jairam54@gmail.com

Salutation: Dear Minister

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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