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Press Release

Chhattisgarh must investigate police inaction in sexual assault case

Authorities in Chhattisgarh must conduct a swift, thorough and independent investigation into the refusal of police officials in Bijapur district, Chhattisgarh to promptly register complaints of rape and sexual assault of Adivasi women.

“The unnecessary delay in registering complaints of sexual violence against police and security forces is extremely worrying,” said Gopika Bashi, Women’s Rights Campaigner at Amnesty International India. “Authorities must thoroughly investigate both the allegations of abuse and the delay.”

Thirteen Adivasi women say they were raped and sexually assaulted by police and security force personnel during search operations in Nendra village, Bijapur, between 11 and 14 January. The personnel allegedly also raped or sexually assaulted other women, threatened and beat up villagers, and stole poultry, food and money.

One of the women’s statements reads: “Two men caught hold of me and dragged me inside my house. They took off my clothes, tore my blouse and pressed my breasts. One policeman raped me and said, ‘We will burn down your houses. If it wasn’t daytime, we would have killed you.’”

On 18 January, the women tried to file a First Information Report at the office of the Bijapur District Collector – the head of local administration. The police recorded the women’s statements, but said they could not register an FIR, despite being required to do so under Indian law.

The women’s lawyer told Amnesty International India, “The women who were raped were not able to even walk properly. Despite that, they went to file an FIR, but police officials refused to register an FIR unless the Superintendent of Police was present”.

On 21 January, activists and civil society groups held a press conference on the case. The police finally registered an FIR later that day against unnamed police and security force personnel for offences including rape, gang-rape and sexual assault.

Amnesty International India was unable to contact the Bijapur District Collector or Superintendent of Police, despite several attempts. SRP Kalluri, the Inspector General of Bastar, another district in Chhattisgarh, denied the allegations. He said, “FIRs are being filed, the truth is being distorted by Maoists.”

Two other cases of alleged sexual violence by security forces have been reported in recent months. On 15 January, six Adivasi women from Kunna village, Sukma district met district administration officials and alleged that security force personnel had stripped and

sexual assaulted them on 12 January. The police are yet to register a First Information Report in the case. On 1 November 2015, women from Pedagelur village, Bijapur filed an FIR alleging rape and sexual violence by security forces between 19 and 24 October. No charges have been filed yet in the case.

“The repeated allegations of sexual violence by security forces in Chhattisgarh point to a disturbing trend. The Chhattisgarh government needs to independently investigate these allegations, and ensure that anyone found responsible is swiftly brought to justice,” said Gopika Bashi.

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