

URGENT ACTION

FEARS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN INDIA

Activists, lawyers and journalists in Bastar, Chhattisgarh, have been facing increased attacks, harassment and threats. It is believed this is intended to deter them from carrying out their work, and has led to some leaving the region in fear for their safety.

On 7 February, a group of over 20 people gathered outside the home of **Malini Subramaniam**, a journalist who has written extensively on human rights violations in the state. They urged her neighbours to throw stones at her house and chanted slogans suggesting that she was an agent for Maoist armed groups. The next morning, stones were thrown at her house, shattering her car's rear windshield. On 17 February, the police summoned her landlord, who told her later that day that she would have to move out of her home as soon as possible. On 18 February, Malini Subramaniam and her family left Bastar due to fears for their safety.

Isha Khandelwal and **Shalini Gera** are members of the Jagdalpur Legal Aid Group (JagLAG), which provides free legal assistance to prisoners in five districts in Chhattisgarh, many of whom are members of Adivasi (indigenous) communities accused of being part of Maoist armed groups. On the night of 17 February, police officials visited the home of the lawyers' landlord, and took him to a local police station. The next morning he told the lawyers that he had "no choice" but to ask them to vacate their home and office. On 19 February, the Inspector General of Police for Bastar announced at a press conference that there had been a threat of attack against JagLAG lawyers. Shalini Gera and Isha Khandelwal left Bastar the following night.

On 20 February, three unidentified men threw a black substance on the face of Adivasi activist and former prisoner of conscience **Soni Sori**, when she was on her way from Jagdalpur to her home in Geedam. They warned her not to continue her activism. She was taken to a hospital in Jagdalpur, and then transferred to a hospital in New Delhi, the country's capital, where her condition is stable. Soni Sori said that she had received a telephone call on 20 February warning her about a potential attack.

The police authorities in Chhattisgarh have failed to provide adequate protection for human rights defenders, despite repeated requests for security on several occasions. Moreover, recent comments to the media by senior police officials questioning the veracity of the attack on Soni Sori have raised doubts about whether the investigation into the incident would be fair or impartial.

Please write immediately in English or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to ensure that activists, journalists and lawyers in Chhattisgarh are able to carry out their professional duties without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference;
- Urging them to hold those responsible for committing any such violations accountable for their actions.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 7 APRIL 2016 TO:

Union Minister of Home Affairs

Rajnath Singh
17, Akbar Road
New Delhi, India
Fax: (011) 91 11 23014184
Email: 38ashokroad@gmail.com
Salutation: Dear Sir

Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh

Raman Singh
Chief Minister's Secretariat,
DKS Bhavan, Mantralaya,
Raipur – 492001, Chhattisgarh, India
Fax: (011) 91 0771 2221306, 2331000
Email: cmcg@nic.in, cmcg@gov.in,
cmhouse11@yahoo.co.in
Salutation: Dear Sir

Inspector General of Police, Bastar

SRP Kalluri
IG Office
Bastar range
Chhattisgarh – 494001
India
Salutation: Dear Sir

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Activists, journalists and human rights defenders in Chhattisgarh frequently face harassment and even false charges and imprisonment for highlighting the human rights situation in the region.

Since 2013, JagLAG lawyers have worked on several cases related to human rights violations allegedly committed by the police and other security forces in the state. Among their clients is Santosh Yadav, a freelance journalist arrested on fabricated charges of rioting, murder and membership of a banned armed group under laws including the Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, both of which violate international human rights law and standards. In recent months, the lawyers have assisted several Adivasi women to file formal complaints in cases of rape and sexual assault allegedly committed by security forces. The lawyers have also carried out research which shows that Adivasi people in the state are frequently arrested by the police on little evidence, and spend long periods in pre-trial detention before being acquitted by courts.

Local journalists Santosh Yadav and Somaru Nag have been in judicial custody since July and September 2015, respectively. Santosh Yadav, who has faced repeated police harassment in the past, faces fabricated charges of rioting, criminal conspiracy, and attempted murder, as well as “associating with a terrorist organization” and “supporting and aiding terrorist groups”. Malini Subramniam has also reported on his case.

Senior police officials in the state have informally accused the JagLAG lawyers of being Maoist sympathisers. Last year, based on an anonymous complaint that the lawyers did not have the correct credentials to practice law in the region, police officials called them in for questioning. In October 2015, the local bar association passed a resolution prohibiting them from practicing in local courts. The lawyers have challenged the resolution in court. They also say that other lawyers who work with them have been harassed and threatened by members of the bar association.

In July 2015, a senior police official allegedly called for the ‘social exclusion’ of prisoners of conscience Soni Sori and Lingaram Kodopi, after they accused the police of carrying out an extrajudicial execution. Soni Sori has been trying for weeks to file a complaint against a high-ranking police official in Bastar in a case involving an alleged extrajudicial execution in Mardum.

Name: Soni Sori, Malini Subramaniam, Shalini Gera, Isha Khandelwal
Gender m/f: Female

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