

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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India: Peaceful demonstrators targeted once again in the Narmada Valley

Amnesty International is alarmed to learn that on 4 June 2003 peaceful demonstrators, mainly belonging to the *adivasi* (tribal) community, were once again arbitrarily targeted for arrest by police in the Narmada Valley. The organization demands that charges brought against the demonstrators be immediately dropped, that the action of the Maharashtra Police in relation to this case be promptly and impartially investigated and that appropriate action be taken against the officers responsible.

In the afternoon of 4 June 186 supporters of the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (NBA, Save the Narmada Movement) were arrested and detained for several hours by Maharashtra Police, following their participation in a peaceful *dharna* (demonstration) in front of the Commissioner's office in Nashik, Maharashtra. They were demanding the halt of any further construction on the Sardar Sarovar dam until land-for-land rehabilitation for the families affected by the project is completed.

According to reports the demonstrators peacefully resisted the attempt by police to shift Medha Patkar, - leader of the demonstration and on indefinite hunger strike since 30 May 2003 - to a hospital. Following the resistance, 186 demonstrators were arrested, brought in police custody and later released on personal bonds during the night. All of them now face charges of rioting, unlawful assembly and acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony. Medha Patkar was forcibly hospitalised, and she is presently on drip. Both the *dharna* and the hunger strike are however continuing.

Amnesty International believes that the act of Maharashtra police is a blatant violation of the right to freedom of expression and of association of the 186 demonstrators, as well as of their leader Medha Patkar. It is in addition arbitrary, as there appears to be no evidence linking the demonstrators with the charges brought against them. The arrests perpetuate a pattern of highhandedness already observed several times in policing operations aimed at controlling peaceful demonstrations in the Narmada Valley.

The rights to freedom of expression and of association are clearly affirmed by the Constitution of India as well as by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which India is a party. The UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms further affirms that "Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms and recognizes the States duties to ensure that these rights are effectively guaranteed.

Background

Narmada Bachao Andolan is a people's movement demanding land-for-land rehabilitation for the families affected by the construction of 30 large dams on the river Narmada, in central India. The movement is presently opposing the decision taken on 15 May 2003 by the Narmada Control Authority (NCA) granting permission to raise the height of the Sardar Sarovar dam from 95 to 100m, thus enlarging the submergence area. This decision comes in the face of abundant evidence - including that furnished by the state sponsored Justice Daud Committee and by a subsequent [Joint-Task Force](#) - that the most basic requirements of fair and just resettlement and rehabilitation of affected populations have not been met even at the current dam height of 95m. The Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal (NWDT) guidelines, which the Supreme Court upheld in 2000, prescribe that resettlement must precede submergence by at least six months.

NBA estimates that the right to life and livelihood of at least 3000 families in Maharashtra and 12000 families in Madhya Pradesh will be violated this monsoon, when they will face submergence due to the increase in the dam height without adequate rehabilitation.

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