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India: Orissa should avoid forced evictions in Jagatsinghpur, instead consult farmers protesting against displacement

Amnesty International is deeply concerned at reports that farmers in Jagatsinghpur in the eastern Indian state of Orissa, protesting against their proposed displacement by the state government for a new industrial project, currently fear forced evictions at the hands of the state police force.

Tension has been high in Jagatsinghpur district after 1,000 officers of the state police force encircled Dhinkia, Nuagaon and Gadakujang *panchayats*, apparently preparing to enter the area. Several villages in the area have been the scene of protests by farmers for the last 14 months against their displacement due to an integrated steel plant to be set up by the South Korean firm, POSCO.

Amnesty International urges that lessons should be learnt from the unfortunate episodes of violence which recently unfurled themselves in Kalingar Nagar (in Orissa) and Nandigram (in neighbouring West Bengal). The use of police force – in a context where consultations have not been held with protesting local communities – resulted in 13 deaths in Kalinga Nagar and at least 14 deaths in Nandigram, apart from serious injuries.

Amnesty International wishes to remind the Government of Orissa of Principle 9 of the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, which says that “law enforcement officials shall not use firearms against persons except in self-defence or defence of others against the imminent threat of death or serious injury, to prevent the perpetration of a particular serious crime involving great threat to life, to arrest a person presenting such a danger and resisting their authority or to prevent his or her escape, and only when less extreme means are insufficient to achieve these objectives.” Any action by the police must be in proportionate response to the action by demonstrators and should avoid unnecessary injuries to civilians.

Amnesty International believes that full consultations about the human rights impact of economic decisions with those to be affected are vital means through which human rights are safeguarded in the context of development.

Amnesty International seeks to remind governments of their obligations to find ways of balancing respect for human rights with attempts to achieve economic growth. Amnesty International reiterates that sustainable development cannot be measured solely in terms of economic indicators: it is a holistic process that embraces the development of civil society, the strengthening of the rule of law and the fulfilment of individuals’ and groups’ aspirations in the civil and political, social and cultural as well as economic spheres.

In this respect, the organisation reiterates its demand that the Government of Orissa should:

avoid forced evictions;
announce and implement a consistent policy of full consultation with local populations before any development which could affect their livelihood can take place; and
ensure that, where it is proposed to resettle populations, there is just, adequate and culturally-sensitive rehabilitation, resettlement and reparation for those affected.

Background

Since June 2005, Jagatsinghpur district has witnessed frequent protests against possible displacement following the Government of Orissa's decision to enter into an agreement with POSCO to enable the latter to set up its integrated steel plant. Since February 2006, protestors have erected barricades in the area where the plant is to come up and prevented officials from entering several villages. The area witnessed violence in February 2007 when elections were held to local bodies in Orissa.