

URGENT ACTION

INDIAN ENVIRONMENTALIST RELEASED FROM JAIL

Dr Harihar Patel, one of the two human rights defenders and environmental rights campaigners who have spent two months in the state of Chhattisgarh, has been released on bail by a local court. He and Ramesh Agrawal had been arrested on false charges on 28 May.

Dr Harihar Patel was released on bail on 28 July. His lawyers informed Amnesty International that the bail petition filed by the other arrested activist, **Ramesh Agrawal**, will be heard by India's Supreme Court on 8 August.

Ramesh Agrawal works for the environmental rights organization Jan Chetna, and is still in detention. He and Dr Harihar Patel, who practices indigenous medicine, were arrested on 28 May in Raigarh town. They had 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 had raised their concerns in mandatory consultations conducted by the authorities. After his arrest, Ramesh Agrawal was kept chained to a bed in a hospital where he was being treated for hypertension. After three days, the police removed the chain following protests that he was being treated in a cruel, inhuman and degrading manner.

The two activists are at the forefront of the campaign for the public disclosure of information relating to these projects which affect Adivasi (Indigenous) communities and for ensuring that this information is available to the communities. Amnesty International believes their arrest was intended to stop their peaceful campaign activities. They have been charged with "circulating defamatory material", "disrupting public order" and "causing alarm and panic among the public" at a mandatory public consultation held by the state authorities at Tamnar 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 result in the forcible acquisition of lands from local communities by the authorities. Objecting to the proposal, the two activists had 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.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in English or your own language:

- Call on the authorities to drop the false charges against Ramesh Agrawal and Dr Harihar Patel and release Ramesh Agrawal immediately;
- Ask 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 12 SEPTEMBER 2011 TO:

Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh

Dr Raman Singh
Chief Minister's Niwas
Raipur 492001, India
Email: cmcg@nic.in cm-cg@nic.in

Salutation: Dear Chief Minister

Minister of Environment and Forests

Jayanthi Natarajan
Paryavaran Bhavan
Lodhi Road, New Delhi 110003, India
Email: jairam54@gmail.com

Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister of Home Affairs

P Chidambaram
North Block
Ministry of Home Affairs
Government of India
New Delhi 110 001, India
Salutation: Dear Minister

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the second update of UA 165/11. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA20/025/2011/en and www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA20/035/2011/en

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