

# URGENT ACTION

## FARMERS AT RISK OF FORCED EVICTION IN INDIA

**An estimated 1,500 families in Jagatsinghpur district in Odisha state are under threat of being forcibly evicted from common land used for farming. On 3 February, armed police officials and a government official used unnecessary force to disperse protesters in Govindpur village.**

The Odisha government is carrying out forced evictions as part of efforts to acquire 283 hectares of land for a steel production plant proposed by South Korean steel company POSCO. According to local activists, between 120 and 200 police officials and a government official from the district authorities entered Govindpur village at 4:00 am on 3 February. A gathering of 150 villagers formed a human blockade to prevent entry. Eyewitnesses told Amnesty International that police and the government official beat villagers with batons, injuring at least 25 people, including children. Three women and one elderly man were severely injured. The police officials also destroyed betel vineyards on common land, which a number of farmers and their families depend on for their livelihood; some farmers received compensation for the destruction, but they say the payment fell far short of potential earnings.

Villagers have been peacefully protesting government expressed intention to acquire land since 14 January. The authorities have so far failed to engage in genuine consultations with affected persons or provide them with adequate notice. **Prashant Paikary**, a local activist, said that state authorities failed to settle local communities' lawful claims over common lands. The proposed steel plant does not possess valid environmental clearance from the central government as required by law. Activists say authorities have also not obtained the consent of community bodies for the use of forest land for industrial projects, which is required by law.

### **Please write immediately in English or your own language urging the Government of Odisha to:**

- Stop all forced evictions in Jagatsinghpur district and ensure any evictions are carried out in accordance with international human rights standards, including genuine consultation with affected persons to identify alternatives to evictions, adequate notice and provision of adequate compensation;
- Order a thorough, independent and impartial investigation into the unnecessary use of force by police and a government official on the morning of 3 February 2013 and hold those with command responsibility to account;
- Ensure compensation to those injured and provide adequate compensation for the property damaged and effective remedies for those already forcibly evicted;
- Recognize the individual and community claims to forest lands as stated in the Forest Rights Act;
- Ensure the authorities carry out a comprehensive human rights and environmental impact assessment of the POSCO project, in consultation with local communities;
- Reinstate the "stop work" order lifted in 2011 to ensure that no work begins on the project until these steps are taken, and the project receives valid environmental and forest clearances.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 22 MARCH 2013 TO:**

Chief Minister, Odisha  
Mr. Naveen Patnaik  
Naveen Nivas  
Aerodrome Road  
Bhubaneswar 751001  
India  
Fax +91 674 2535100  
E-mail: cmo@ori.nic.in

### Minister Environment & Forests

Mrs. Jayanthi Natarajan  
Paryavaran Bhawan, CGO Complex  
Lodhi Road  
New Delhi 110 003, India  
Fax: +91 11 2436 2222, +91 11 2436  
2016  
E-mail: mosefgoi@nic.in

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.**

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

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

According to India's Forest Rights Act, 2008, common lands refers to village property which falls under the authority and sanctions of local bodies and is intended to be used by local communities. Local communities have filed claims for lands under the Act. The only public consultation was done in April 2007 when the above act had not come into effect.

Two official investigations ordered by India's Ministry of Environment and Forests have raised serious concerns about the authorities' attempts to acquire these common lands. These investigations also revealed that the proposed steel project had violated national environmental laws and coastal regulations, and that the potential negative impact on local community livelihoods had not been adequately assessed. Despite these findings, the central authorities accepted the Orissa state authorities' declaration that no local communities living in the area have rights to the common lands.

The Ministry of Environment and Forests has also said that any use of forestland for non-forest purposes has to receive the consent of local bodies. Activists say local bodies have refused to give their consent to the land being used for the project.

In March 2012, the National Green Tribunal, a dedicated environmental court, suspended the environmental clearance given to the steel plant project. The court said that the Ministry of Environment and Forests had erred significantly in assessing the environmental impact of the project, and had left 'lingering and threatening environmental and ecological doubts unanswered.'

Name: Prashant Paikary (m) and 1,500 families in Jagatsinghpur district in Odisha State, India

Gender m/f: both

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