

URGENT ACTION

ANTI-STEEL PLANT LEADER RELEASED ON BAIL

Narayan Reddy was released on bail on 19 May after five months in prison. He is part of a campaign against South Korean company POSCO's intended acquisition of common lands used by local farmers in the eastern Indian state of Orissa, to build a steel plant. He is still facing a murder charge, which Amnesty International believes has no basis.

Narayan Reddy, a leader of the Communist Party of India in Orissa, was arrested on 23 December 2011 and charged with murder, after a clash on 15 December 2011 between workers building an access road for the steel plant and local protestors, in which 25 people were injured and one person died. However, Amnesty International understands that Narayan Reddy was not directly involved in this clash.

Another leader of the Communist Party of India in Orissa, Abhay Sahoo, spent more than three months in prison before he was released on bail in March 2012 (see UA 364/11, ASA 20/050/2011). Amnesty International believes that the charges levelled against Abhay Sahoo and Narayan Reddy are fabricated and are intended to silence the ongoing campaign against the state authorities' plans to acquire 1,080 hectares of land in five villages, the majority of which are common lands farmed by villagers, to make way for the proposed POSCO plant. The communities have filed claims under the Forest Rights Act, 2008 to part of these common lands, and insist that the government has not considered these. For the last seven years, campaigners have blockaded the area, keeping out the authorities and POSCO representatives. The planned steel plant is the biggest foreign direct investment project in India.

On 30 March 2012, the National Green Tribunal, a specialized body set up to settle environmental disputes, suspended the environmental clearance which had been granted to the POSCO plant in January 2011, after hearing a petition filed by environmental activists in Orissa. On 16 May 2012, POSCO and the Orissa authorities had agreed to reduce the amount of land planned to be acquired for the plant from 1,600 hectares to 1,080 hectares, and its annual capacity from 12 million tonnes to eight million tonnes. Abhay Sahoo told Amnesty International in response that the protests would continue, as the farmers were not willing to give up their use of the common lands.

Amnesty International will continue to monitor the legal action against Narayan Reddy and Abhay Sahoo closely, and take further action if necessary.

No further action is requested from the UA network. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.

Name: Narayan Reddy

Gender m/f: m

This is the first update of UA 8/12. Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA20/002/2012/en>

Further information on UA: 8/12 Index: ASA 20/022/2012 Issue Date: 24 May 2012

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