

AI Index: PRE 01/122/2012
07 March 2012

India: Release Soni Sori on International Women's Day

The Indian authorities must release Soni Sori, an activist and school teacher imprisoned and allegedly tortured for speaking out against human rights abuses, Amnesty International said in a call to mark International Women's Day on 8 March.

The Amnesty International prisoner of conscience was arrested after she criticised Maoists as well as state forces for human rights violations in the armed insurgency in central India.

Her father was shot in the leg by Maoists, while her husband has been in jail for one year on charges of having collaborated with the left wing group.

“On International Women's Day, Indian authorities should be applauding the work of brave women like Soni Sori, who dare to speak up for human rights,” said Amnesty International's India researcher Ramesh Gopalakrishnan.

Indian activists have criticized the authorities for their treatment of Soni Sori and, in collaboration with Amnesty International, [have launched a video campaign](#) featuring activists holding up symbolic garlands with the words "shame" on them.

“Activists in India are sending the government a clear message: Soni Sori's treatment is shameful – hence the garlands of shame.” said Gopalakrishnan.

Arrested on 4 October 2011 in New Delhi, Soni Sori was charged by Chhattisgarh state police with acting as a courier and transferring funds of 1.5 million Indian rupees (US \$300,000) from a corporate mining firm, Essar, to the Maoists as “protection money”, to ensure mining operations could be carried out unhindered. She and five others including her nephew Lingaram Kodopi, face trial on 13 March.

Following her arrest, she was held in police custody for two days on 8 and 9 October and intensively questioned. In a letter to India's Supreme Court, Soni Sori alleged that she was tortured.

A police official, she alleged, forced her out of her cell, stripped her and gave her electric shocks, causing acute pain all over her body, head and spine.

By the time of her appearance in Dantewada court on 10 October, she was unable to walk.

On 29 October, the government medical college hospital in Kolkata examined her under court order, reporting back on 14 November that two stones had been inserted in her vagina and one in her rectum, and that she had annular tears in her spine.

On 2 December the court asked the Chhattisgarh authorities to respond to allegations of torture, and ordered her transferred from Jagdalpur prison to Raipur central prison where she is currently held.

“Soni Sori must be released unconditionally and an independent investigation mounted into allegations of torture. Those police officials responsible including those at the highest levels of command should be prosecuted, in line with international law,” said Ramesh Gopalakrishnan.

Meanwhile, a senior Chattisgarh police official, accused by Soni Sori of ordering her alleged torture while she was being interrogated, has been awarded a gallantry award by authorities.

“Awarding gallantry medals to people who should be investigated is insulting,” said Ramesh Gopalakrishnan.

Soni Sori is an Adivasi and an advocate of Gandhian peaceful protest. Her case will be heard again in late March 2012.

To watch Soni Sori’s [campaign video <click here>](#)