

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
PRESS RELEASE**

AI Index: PRE 01/432/2010
24 December 2010

India: Dr Binayak Sen's conviction and life sentence mock justice

The life sentence handed down against Dr Binayak Sen by a court in the India state of Chhattisgarh violates international fair trial standards and is likely to enflame tensions in the conflict-affected area, Amnesty International said today.

"Life in prison is an unusually harsh sentence for anyone, much less for an internationally recognized human rights defender who has never been charged with any act of violence," said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific director. "State and federal authorities in India should immediately drop these politically motivated charges against Dr Sen and release him."

Dr Binayak Sen was convicted of sedition and conspiracy under the Chhattisgarh Special Public Safety Act, 2005, and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 2004. He was immediately taken into custody after the announcement of the sentence, having been out on bail since May 2009.

"Dr Sen, who is considered a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International, was convicted under laws that are impermissibly vague and fall well short of international standards for criminal prosecution," Sam Zarifi said. "Instead of persecuting Dr Sen, authorities in Chhattisgarh should be acting to protect the people of the region from the abuses committed by the Maoists, as well as state security forces and militias."

"This sentence will seriously intimidate other human rights defenders who would provide a peaceful outlet for the people's grievances, especially for the indigenous Adivasi population," Sam Zarifi said.

India's central government has acknowledged that the intensifying armed conflict with the Maoists in central India is a reflection of serious inequities and a history of human rights violations in the area. Amnesty International believes that the charges against Dr Sen are baseless and politically motivated.

Dr Binyak Sen is a pioneer of health care to marginalized and indigenous communities in Chhattisgarh, where the state police and armed Maoists have been engaged in clashes over the last seven years. He has reported on unlawful killings of Adivasis (Indigenous People) by the police and by Salwa Judum, a private militia widely held to be sponsored by the state authorities to fight the armed Maoists.

Dr Binyak Sen was detained without proper charges for seven months, denied bail, and kept in solitary confinement for three weeks. Many of the charges against him stem from laws that contravene international standards. Repeated delays in the conduct of his trial have cast doubts about its fairness.

Amnesty International has repeatedly called on the Indian authorities to immediately drop all the charges against Dr Binyak Sen.