

Human Rights Defenders Alert - India

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Dear Sir,

Sub: HRD Alert - India - Urgent Appeal for Action – Orissa – Jagatsinghpur District – POSCO proposed land site – Apprehend violence action on the part of the Orissa police late night today or tomorrow night as carried out earlier last month - Urgent intervention requested – regarding

Greetings from Human Rights Defenders Alert - India!

HRD Alert - India is a Forum of Human Rights Defenders for Human Rights Defenders. It endeavours to initiate actions on behalf of Human Rights Defenders under threat or with security concerns.

We are now writing to express our grave concern regarding the aapprehend violence action on the part of the Orissa police late night today or tomorrow night as carried out earlier last month

Incident:

Today i.e on 2nd March 2013, the government of Odisha has sent around six platoons of police at Badagabapur (near POSCO transit camp). It is anticipated that the police repeat a forceful police operation tomorrow or late tomorrow night. We are also informed that the human rights defenders from the villages around the proposed site are in high alert to face any forceful land acquisition for POSCO steel plant.

As you know that the State Legislative Assembly session is in interegnum from February 26- March 7, 2013 and hence the Odisha Government has begun preparations to resume forceful land acquisition in our village.

The Government was forced to stop land takeover activities at Gobindapur village in the proposed project site in the first week of February owing to stiff opposition from the villagers and concerned people across the globe.

The Odisha government is going ahead with the forceful land acquisition process for the steel plant despite the fact that POSCO does not have an environmental clearance for the project. The environmental clearance given by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) on January 31, 2011 was suspended by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) on March 30 of 2012. POSCO does not even have a Memorandum of Understanding with the State Government of Orissa now. The one it had signed on July 22, 2005 lapsed on July 21, 2010 and no fresh MoU has been signed so far. Hence any step at acquiring land now does not have any legal basis.

Even, the Grama Sabha meeting of Govindpur and Dhinkia panchayat on 18 October, 2012 in which more than 2000 residents unanimously participated and voted, voted against diversion of land for POSCO's project under provisions of the Forest Rights Act 2006. The ongoing land acquisition is a blatant violation of the Forest Rights Act as the rights over forest lands in our area are not being recognized and vested and consent of the Palli Sabhas has not been obtained by the State government.

Appeal:

We therefore appeal that :

- the DC of Jagatsinghpur district ensure that the police forces who have arrived there last night in the cover of darkness do not engage in any action without the authority of law to forcibly take over land or engage in process of using any force on the peaceful human rights defenders who are fighting any forcible take over of their ancestral land.
- to prevent any attack during the peaceful assembly of the protesting human rights defenders in Jagatsinghpur district of Orissa.

We thank you for your kind understanding and expect your urgent intervention.

Yours sincerely,



Henri Tiphagne

Honorary National Working Secretary

Human Rights Defenders Alert - India