

Human Rights Defenders Alert - India

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The Chairperson
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Dear Sir,

Sub: HRD Alert - India - Urgent Appeal for Action – Uttar Pradesh: Brutal attack on women human rights defenders in Lalitpur– Reg

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 brutal attack on women human rights defenders in Lalitpur, Uttar Pradesh.

About the Human Rights Defenders under attack:

Ms. Meena, Ms. Kusum, Ms. Gyasi, Ms. Nirmla and Ms. Urmila. These women were part of Sahjani Shiksha Kendra (SSK) and were inaugurating an adult literacy centre for Dalit women in the village when they were assaulted. The SSK and Nirantar have been working in Lalitpur since 2002, for the empowerment of Dalit and Adivasi women and girls through literacy and educational interventions. SSK is the only women-headed organization in the district, staffed primarily of Dalit and BC women in Lalitpur, working with nearly 3000 Dalit and Adivasi women. In the last ten years, SSK and Nirantar have worked towards equality on the basis of gender and caste by addressing issues of gender-based violence. By empowering and skilling rural women, SSK has also worked on monitoring the implementation of government schemes and programmes for the rural poor, such as MNREGA and RTE. An important aspect of SSK and Nirantar's work is the running of Adult Literacy Centres in the villages of Lalitpur.

The Perpetrators: Sahib Singh Yadav

Date and Time of Incident: Sunday, 12 May 2013

Place of Incident: Digwara village of Madawara block, Uttar Pradesh.

Incident:

On May 12, 2013, a literacy centre for Dalit women was being inaugurated by the SSK team in Digwara village of Madawara block. About 30 Dalit women had gathered for the inauguration ceremony. While the SSK team was singing songs and gathering the women, Sahib Singh Yadav, a powerful man, physically and verbally assaulted 5 staff members (Meena, Kusum, Gyasi, Nirmla and Urmila) of SSK. The man did not want SSK to work with Dalit women in this village and in order to stop them from inaugurating the centre; he attacked them with a lathi. Two of the SSK team members have sustained serious head and body injuries. One of them even has received 7 stitches on her forehead. Two of the survivors are from the Dalit community and two from the OBC community.

Sahib Singh used caste-based abuses like 'chamarni', 'basorni' and sexually explicit language to humiliate and frighten the women activists. He also threatened them, saying he would kill them if they ever came back to the area. The villagers were also threatened with dire consequences if they gave any statement against him.

The FIR and a Medical Report in this case has been filed. However, the sections under which the case has been registered (IPC 323/ 504/506, including the SC/ST Act) are very weak. Four days later, Sahib Singh Yadav is still on the run.

This is not the first time such an incident has occurred with the SSK field staff. Last year, Sandhya Ahirwar, a Dalit SSK field activist, was physically and verbally assaulted in Madawara by two men from the dominant caste. A complaint was registered, but she was pressured into withdrawing the complaint.

This incident shows that human rights defenders, particularly Dalit and Adivasi women, are vulnerable to caste-based and gender-based violence. Also, this is a serious violation of the constitutional commitment to equality and freedom given that the women have been attacked for working with the Dalit community.

The incident also raises the issue of safety of women activists who fight for the rights of marginalized communities such as Dalit and Adivasis as they are challenging oppressive structures of patriarchy and caste.

Appeal

We, therefore, urge you to immediately take necessary steps to ensure that:-

- The FIR is amended on the basis of the real life incident; it should record the grievous nature of injuries suffered and accordingly the FIR must be changed.
- Sahib Singh Yadav is arrested immediately.
- SSK staff and the people of Dalit Basti of Digwara village are provided security by the local police as they are under serious threat.
- All necessary measures are taken to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of five women human rights defenders.
- All human rights defenders in India are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment in all circumstances.

Looking forward to your immediate action in this regard,

Yours sincerely,



Henri Tiphagne

Honorary Working Secretary

Human Rights Defenders Alert - India

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