

## *Human Rights Defenders Alert - India*

National Coordination Office

No.6, Vallabhai Road, Chokkikulam, Madurai 625 002, Tamil Nadu, INDIA

Tel: +91-452-2539520 Cell Phone: +91-9994368540 Email: [hrda.india@gmail.com](mailto:hrda.india@gmail.com)

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Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders,  
Mrs. Margaret Sekaggya  
c/o Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights - Palais Wilson  
United Nations Office at Geneva  
CH 1211 Geneva 10  
Switzerland  
Email: [urgent-action@ohchr.org](mailto:urgent-action@ohchr.org)

Dear Ma'am,

Sub: *HRD Alert - India - Urgent Appeal for Action - Madhya Pradesh: Civil and Environmental rights activist Ms. Shehla Masood shot dead - 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 murder of Ms. Shehla Masood, a civil rights and Environmental rights activist.

### **Incident:**

**Name of the perpetrators** : Unidentified

**Place of incident** : In front of the victim's residence in Koh-e-Fiza locality in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

**Date and time of incident** : On 16th August, 2011, around 11 AM

According to the information received, Shehla Masood was shot dead by an unidentified assailant outside her house in the city's posh Koh-e-Fiza locality as she was on her way to an anti-corruption campaign being organised by her and other activists in support of Mr. Anna Hazare.

A prominent Right to Information activist and supporter of social activist Anna Hazare's anti-corruption campaign was shot dead outside her residence in Bhopal on 16<sup>th</sup> of August.

Shehla Masood was shot dead by an unidentified assailant outside her house in the city's posh Koh-e-Fiza locality as she was on her way to an anti-corruption campaign being organised by her and other activists in support of Mr. Anna Hazare at the Bhopal Boat Club. According to Bhopal Senior Superintendent of Police Adarsh Katiyar, the Police have registered the case as Unnatural Death.

Bhopal, not used to the professionally executed metro-style shootout, was stunned at the activist's death. According to her close associate and one another RTI activist of Bhopal Mr. Ajay Dube stated that Masood was planning to organize a campaign where they were about to prepare a 200 foot wide banner in which they will ask the people of Bhopal to write the name of the leaders who are corrupted. He expressed his shock while revealing this matter to the media.

Ms. Masood, who also ran an event management company, had managed to constantly annoy the powers that be with her incisive RTI queries and public campaigns, mostly against corruption and for wildlife conservation. She was also a freelance journalist, contributing regularly to news website [rediff.com](http://rediff.com) on issues related to the environment and tiger conservation. In September 2010, her NGO Udai had launched a massive signature campaign in MP against killing of the Jurjuria tigress in Bandhavgarh reserve on May 18, 2010.

Last year, Ms. Masood had told the authorities she “feared for her life” from a senior officer of the Indian Police Service and had complained about the matter to two successive police chiefs of the State.

Ms. Masood had written to the current Madhya Pradesh Director-General of Police S.K. Raut, complaining against a particular officer. In the letter, Ms. Masood had accused him of harassing her and making threatening calls to her, about which she had lodged a complaint at the city's Maharana Pratap Nagar Police Station in 2008.

"I fear for my life from [him]. Please do the needful and oblige," she had urged the DGP.

The officer concerned, did not answer calls or reply to text messages seeking his clarification on the matter. While speaking to news person Bhopal IG Shailendra Shrivastava told "Yes, there was a complaint against the said officer. We sent Ms. Masood several notices offering probes at the thana level, additional SP level and DIG level, all of which she refused. Finally, I requested her to give me her statement. But she said she had filed a case against the said officer in Lokayukta and that she would give me a statement only once the Lokayukta probe was over."

Like other RTI activists across India who have paid the ultimate price for making persistent and uncomfortable queries, Ms. Masood's efforts may well have put her in harm's way.

She was planning to file a Public Interest Litigation petition against a private college based on recent media reports. "It is a very powerful group of people, including local political leaders, which I will be up against once I file this PIL. I know who they are but I can't speak out much as I am still collecting information," Ms. Masood had confessed, speaking to the media last week.

Ms. Masood was also an active tiger conservationist and environmental crusader, constantly digging up information on the poaching mafia, illegal diamond mining mafia, timber mafia and the hospitality industry, which she said was violating environmental laws.

We demand that the possible connection between her murder and her raising the issue of illegal Diamond mining project in Chhattarpur district, Madhya Pradesh by Rio Tinto, a transnational mining company headquartered in the UK, combining Rio Tinto plc, a London and NYSE listed company, and Rio Tinto Limited, which is

listed on the Australian Securities Exchange must be investigated along with other suspicions by a high level probe team.

We salute the struggle and martyrdom of Shehla Masood who defended our forests, rivers, land and wildlife in the face of unscrupulous corporate assault in nexus with ruling political regimes.

Shehla Masood used to conclude her messages with a proud “Roarrrrr” that cannot be silenced by the bullets of her assailants.

The brutal murder of Shehla exposes the fate of those protesting illegal mining and fighting to save tigers and forests.

### **Appeal**

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

1. Ensure that an impartial investigation is conducted and the perpetrators and conspirators of this heinous killing of Ms. Shehla Masood are arrested soon
2. The case should be altered to Murder and not Unnatural Death.
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that human rights defenders are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals, and free of all restrictions.
4. Ensure in all circumstances the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and with international and regional human rights instruments ratified by India.

Looking forward to your immediate action in this regard,

Yours sincerely,

***Henri Tiphagne***

Honorary Working Secretary

Human Rights Defenders Alert - India