

Human Rights Defenders Alert - India

National Coordination Office

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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

Dear Ma'am,

Sub: *HRD Alert - India - Urgent Appeal for Action - Srinagar: Attack and illegal detention of two photojournalists - 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 alleged attack by the police and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) on two photojournalists on August 19, 2011 in Srinagar.

Incident

Name of the perpetrators - Joint team of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) troopers and policemen in the Old City of Srinagar.

Place of incident: - Srinagar, Kashmir

Date & time of incident: - On the afternoon of 19th August 2011

According to the information received on 19.8.2011 the Mexican photojournalist Narciso Contreras, working with U.S.-based press agency Zuma, was detained in the Nowhatta area. He was allegedly chased from the scene of a confrontation between political demonstrators and security forces and forcibly taken away from a house where he took shelter. He was taken to

a police station, brutally beaten up and reportedly warned not to publish his photographs. He has also reported losing a large sum of money during his arrest and "torture."

Showkat Shafi, a local freelance photographer, who often contributes to international news agencies, was detained while covering the same demonstration. He too was taken to the local police station and beaten up.

The two photojournalists, including a foreign national were allegedly detained, beaten to pulp by the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) troopers and policemen during pro-freedom demonstrations in the Old City of Srinagar.

Eyewitnesses told that Showkat Shafi, who works as a freelancer with Al Jazeera English website and his Mexican friend- California-based Zuma Press photojournalist Narciso Contreras were allegedly thrashed to the pulp and later detained by the joint team of CRPF and police, when the duo were covering stone pelting protests in Nowhatta area of the Old City.

The photojournalists, they said, were dragged by the forces to the police station Nowhatta, where they were detained 'illegally for over five hours'. Both the photographers received serious injuries due to the beating. They were rushed to the SMHS hospital by their colleagues when released by police 'in an injured and traumatic condition'.

The photojournalists' stated that "We were performing our professional duty, when a contingent of CRPF men intercepted us in a lane. Without saying a word they pounced on us. They not only abused us, but beat us with bamboo sticks and gun butts for over 15 minutes," a visibly shocked Shafi told this correspondent at the SMHS hospital, where he was brought by his colleagues. The doctors at the hospital later referred Shafi to SK Institute of medical sciences for specialized treatment.

They were later dragged to the police station and were detained for 5 hours. The cops didn't even stop beating them inside the police station. After then they were released in injured state. Narciso Contreras suffered multiple

injuries in the forces action and besides beating him ruthlessly police took away Rs 50,000 from his bag in the police station.

Meanwhile, police refuted the allegations and said that two photojournalists were released after being detained along with a few stone pelters inside a shop.

Superintendent of Police (SP) north, stated that the youth pelted stones on CRPF and on policemen. When they chased, some of them entered a shop. At least six people were arrested from the shop, two among them later turned out to be photojournalists. They were released instantly.

Few clipping during the attack:-

1. Photojournalist working with Al Jazeera, Showkat Shafi (encircled) being taken away into custody at Nowhatta.



2. Forces corner Shovvket Shafi, who works with Al Jazeera, in an alley before detaining him at Nowhatta police station.



3. Mexican photojournalist Narciso Contreras, who works with Zuma press, lies on a stretcher inside SMHS hospital after he was beaten by forces in Old city.



Appeal

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

1. Immediate measures must be taken to provide physical and psychological integrity of the two photojournalists Narciso Contreras and Showkat Shafi.
2. Immediate action against the accused policemen who were responsible for this act.

3. Adequate reparation, including rehabilitation and compensation should be provided to the victims.
4. A full, impartial and thorough inquiry into the acts of arrest, illegal detention, intimidation, harassment of the photojournalists Narciso Contreras and Showkat Shafi ,with a view to publishing the findings and bringing those responsible to justice;
5. Guarantee in all circumstances that 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

Looking forward to your immediate action in this regard,

Yours sincerely,

Henri Tiphagne

National Coordinator

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