

Human Rights Defenders Alert - India

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Shri A. K. Parashar

Focal Point - Human Rights Defenders

National Human Rights Commission

Faridkot House

Copernicus Marg

New Delhi-110001

Email: hrd-nhrc@nic.in

Dear Sir,

*Sub: HRD Alert - India - Urgent Appeal for Action -India-Odisha-
Nuapokhari - Anti-Posco leader Abhay Sahu arrested - 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 arrest of Mr. Abhay Sahu - the top leader of Anti-Posco agitation and the President of POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti in Odisha.

Incident

Name of the Perpetrators: Jagatsinghpur district police

Place of incident: Nuapokhari village near Erasama, Jagatsinghpur district, about 200 km from Bhubaneswar, Odisha

Date and time of incident: 25th November 2011 at 7.45 pm

Mr. Sahu (54) is the head of POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti, a Communist Party of India backed organization, which has been

spearheading agitation against the proposed USD 12 billion Steel Project by South Korean company POSCO in Jagatsinghpur district.

The PPSS chief has been leading an agitation for the last six years against land acquisition for the proposed Rs 52,000 crore Posco Steel Project.

Mr. Abhay Sahu, the top leader of the anti POSCO agitation in Odisha's Jagatsinghpur district, was arrested on 25th November 2011 (Friday) in the evening near Nuapokhari village near Erasama in the district, about 200 km from Bhubaneswar.

Case Narrative:

Sahu had led the movement against Posco from Dinkia grampanchayat in Jagatsinghpur district preventing all attempts by the state government in acquiring land for the steel project. The locals have even prevented the construction of a coastal road from Dinkia to Noliasahi. Though Orissa has so far acquired over 2000 acres of land of the 3700 acres needed for the project, work is yet to start as key parts of the steel plant are in the villages where the anti-Posco protestors have dug their heels in. This is the second time Sahu was arrested. In October 2008, he was arrested over pending criminal cases, but was granted bail in August 2009 by the HC.

Police officials in Jagatsinghpur arrested Sahu at Nuapokhari village around 7.45 pm over the suicide of a woman allegedly due to dowry demands. The police team stopped Sahu's car on Manijanga - Erasama road near the proposed project site of South Korean steel major Posco following the information and took him into custody. The woman's parents had alleged that their daughter's corpse was burnt hastily at the behest of Sahu. There were other cases against Sahu including that of atrocity against a Dalit.

The cases slapped by police against Sahu related to alleged assault and imposition of fine on people who did not support him. Sahu, however, refuted the charges and claimed that he was arrested in false cases.

Mr. Prasant Paikray, the spokesman of PPSS, said it was a deliberate move by the administration to suppress agitation against the POSCO project.

The PPSS condemned the arrest and described it as a conspiracy to suppress the movement Posco.

Appeal

We, therefore, urge you to immediately take necessary steps to

1. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security to Mr. Abhay Sahu including the provision of protection;
2. Release Mr. Abhay Sahu immediately and unconditionally since her detention is arbitrary as it only aims at sanctioning his human rights activities;
3. Put an end to any acts of harassment - including at the judicial level - against Mr. Abhay Sahu and more generally against all human rights defenders in India so that they are able to carry out their work without hindrances and fear of reprisals;
4. Ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments ratified by India.

Looking forward to your immediate action in this regard,

Yours sincerely,

Henri Tiphagne

Hon. National Working Secretary,

Human Rights Defenders Alert - India