

Human Rights Defenders Alert - India

National Coordination Office

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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 - Orissa - RTI Activist has been threatened of dire consequence by Government official in Bolangir - 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 threats of attack against the BPL RTI applicant Mr. Gopabandhu Chhatria.

Incident

Name of the Perpetrators: Mr. Birendra Tripathy, SDO, Rural Works-Deogan Block

Place of incident: Bolangir District, Odisha

Date of incident: 18th October 2011

According to the information received, Mr. Gopabandhu Chhatria, a HR Defender and a BPL RTI applicant of Deogan Block under Bolangir District of Orissa has been threatened of attack by Mr. Birendra Tripathy, SDO, Rural Works, Bolangir on 18.10.2011.

In a complaint petition addressed to Superintendent of Police, Bolangir on 24.10.2011, Mr. Chhatria has stated that he had submitted an application seeking information about newly constructed building for Tahsil office located before Deogan Block from the PIO, office of SDO, Rural Works, Bolangir. Without providing information, Mr. Birendra Tripathy made a call from his mobile (9437150548) to Chhatria (9668523372) and threatened him of dire consequence, if he continued seeking information from his office. Then he handed over his mobile to a contractor who also scolded Chhatria and asked him to refrain from accessing any information from the said office.

Background of the incident:

It needs to be mentioned here that Mr. Chhatria, Jarasingha, District-Bolangir had sought information about a newly constructed building for Tahsil office in his area. Though it was constructed a few months back, this building has been cracked and water flowing from the roof. The work is substandard and getting no use for the people. Apprehending corruption and irregularities in the fund allotted for the said work, Chhatria has sought information to know the details of expenditure and sample of the building. Chhatria is yet to get any response from SP, Bolangir.

Last year, Chhatira was arrested by the local police and put behind bar following a false FIR lodged against him by the then BDO, Deogan Block in 2009. He was allegedly harassed by the Block Development Officer, Deogan for he had sought information about irregularities in construction of Check Dam.

It is a saddening fact that the attack on RTI Activists gets rising day by day in Orissa.

Appeal

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

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the incident of the alleged threats on Mr. Gopabandhu Chhatria with a view to bring those responsible to justice in accordance with national and international standards;
2. Ensure that the possible connection between the attack and his RTI petition on the issue of newly constructed Tahsil Office in Deogan, to be investigated along with other suspicions by a high level probe team;
3. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological security and integrity of Mr. Gopabandhu and all other RTI activists in the country;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that RTI activists in India are able to carry out their legitimate activities without fear of reprisals, and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment;
5. Create an enabling environment and ensure respect for the rights of individuals in Odisha engaged in the activities of obtaining information.

Looking forward to your immediate action in this regard,

Yours sincerely,

Henri Tiphagne

Hon. National Working Secretary,
Human Rights Defenders Alert - India