

Human Rights Defenders Alert - India

National Coordination Office

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January 3, 2012

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 Sir/Ma'am,

***Sub: HRD Alert - India - Urgent Appeal for Action - India/
Karnataka/Hassan - RTI activist claims threat to life from official - 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 denial of information and death threats faced by Mr. Mari Joseph a RTI activist in Hassan.

Incident

Name of the perpetrators: Mr. Shive Gowda, Hassan Taluk Panchayat Executive Officer, Hassan, Karnataka

Date of Incident: January 1, 2012

Place of Incident: Panchayat Office, Hassan District, Karnataka

According to the information received a Right to Information (RTI) activist Mr. R. Mari Joseph has alleged that Hassan Taluk Panchayat Executive Officer threatened to kill him for seeking information about irregularities in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA).

He said that the Dalit Vimochana Manava Hakkugala Vedike, under his leadership, had staged a protest on 29, December 2011 (Thursday) demanding inquiry into irregularities in projects under MNREGA in many gram panchayats in Hassan Taluk, Karnataka, India.

On 30th December 2011, some people representing the Melgodu Gram Panchayat staged a counter protest to refute the allegations.

The protesters were also there at Hassan Taluk Panchayat Office while the executive officer Mr. Shive Gowda threatened Mr. Mari Joseph.

Background Information:

As per the information received, the Dalit Vimochane Manavahakkugala Vedike has alleged that a large - scale corruption is made in making payments under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act schemes in Hassan taluk.

Members of the Vedike staged a dharna outside the Deputy Commissioner's office on 29th December 2011, demanding Lokayukta to inquire into the same. The protesters took out a procession from the Hemavati statue before staging the dharna.

Mr. R. Mari Joseph told that machinery was being used to implement works taken up under the scheme and workers were not being paid for purchasing implements.

He also claimed that attempts to get records pertaining to implementation of the job guarantee scheme under the Right to Information Act had failed as the information officer concerned had demanded Rs. 17,000 as a fee to provide copies of the documents.

The protesters demanded that the Government increase wages under the scheme to Rs. 300 a day and provide work for at least 300 days a year.

They submitted a memorandum to Deputy Commissioner K.G. Jagadeesh. B.P. Jayaram of the DSS and artiste K.T Shivaprasad were among those present.

Artist K.T. Shivaprasad, district convener of Dalit Sangharsha Samiti B.P. Jayaram and other leaders at the press conference demanded that the officer be suspended immediately.

Appeal

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

1. Immediate intervention of the police administration, necessary legal action is taken and all the perpetrators are brought to book;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the incident with a view to bring those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological security and integrity to Mr. R. Mari Joseph in order to carry out their legitimate human rights work peacefully;
4. Create an enabling environment and guarantee in all circumstances that all right to information activists 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

Hon'ble National Working Secretary

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