

Human Rights Defenders Alert - India

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May 8, 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

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Switzerland

Email: urgent-action@ohchr.org

Dear Ma'am,

Sub: *HRD Alert - India - Urgent Appeal for Action – Tamilnadu: Tirunelveli District: Idinthakarai: For Withdrawal of existing false charges and stopping of new charges filed against the Koodankulam Nuclear Power Plant Protestors (KKNPP) and immediate halting of the ongoing work at the Plant site - 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 all false cases implicated against the Koodankulam Nuclear Power Plant Protestors (KKNPP) and seek the withdrawal of the same and the immediate halting of the ongoing work at the Koodankulam site in Tirunelveli District, Tamilnadu.

Human Rights Defenders Alert India had issued an urgent appeal earlier when basic amenities were blocked for protestors and many of them were arrested. Owing to the intense nature of the issue, it has also created a separate blog site for the Koodankulam issue. http://www.peopleswatch.org/hrda/?page_id=338

Background information:

The Tamil Nadu government initially supported the popular Peoples Movement Against Nuclear Energy (PMANE) protests since October 2011 and halted work at the plant. But

one day after a landslide victory for its party in a crucial by-election in nearby Sankarankoil, the Tamil Nadu government reversed its public stand on March 19, 2012, and permitted re-commencement of work at the plant, citing its own safety findings. It simultaneously maintained continued surveillance, harassment and pressure on the protesters while also initiating charges against them, and increased power outage in Tamil Nadu to up to 12 hours per day in the last months in order to garner support of people in other parts of Tamil Nadu for the nuclear plant. It also immediately clamped down on the movement and protesters as anti-state using its police, paramilitary, intelligence, legal and media machinery. It subsequently ignored Peoples Movement Against Nuclear Energy (PMANE) protestors and forced them to negotiate on the government's terms and to give up a 9 day indefinite hunger strike undertaken by 15 of its members including its leader Udaya Kumar on March 19, 2012 following governmental 'assurances' to look into their safety concerns and to dismiss the increasingly serious charges foisted against the arrested protesters.

Incident:

According to the information received the indefinite hunger strike has been going on for the past 5 days. About 25 men have been on the fast since May 1, 2012. About 302 women and 10 more men joined the strike from May 4, 2012. Many more women are eager to join the indefinite hunger strike but because of logistical issues such as space, bedding and toilet facilities, they are not in a position to accommodate them all.

Many of the men have become very tired and are suffering from fatigue and nausea. Scores of women are suffering from severe headache and some seem to be dehydrated because of the scorching summer heat. They need immediate medical advice and help.

The Tehsildar (country administrator) of Radhapuram told that he would send a medical team to check the health of the hunger strikers. Nobody has come so far and they contacted the officer again on May 7, 2012 in this regard.

The Koodankulam Nuclear Power Plant Protestors have been struggling patiently, peacefully and nonviolently for the past nine months and have not hurt or harmed or killed anybody or damaged any public or private properties. No untoward incident has ever taken place. But neither the central government nor the state government has ever

tried to meet the people or listen to their opinions, thoughts, feelings and standpoints about the Koodankulam nuclear power project in a democratic manner.

Instead of talking to the people, the authorities are warning them not to turn the movement into a violent one when the whole world knows that the people have been struggling nonviolently for the past nine months.

When Maoists kidnap MLAs and District Collectors and engage in random acts of violence such as attacking police stations and killing people, the governments nominate high-level mediators, talk to the Maoists in their own hideouts and grant all their wishes and demands then and there. But when the people struggle peacefully and nonviolently, the governments, authorities, politicians, scientists and even some pro-government media houses turn a deaf ear.

The helpless and desperate protestors have appealed to the Indian civil society and the international community to come to their rescue as the men and women are becoming weak and tired. They also remain open to dialogue with the government officials but they demand a written agreement with a definite action plan and clear timeline.

Appeal

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

1. Immediately and unconditionally withdraw all the false cases against the members of the struggle committee and the common people and stop new charges from being slapped;
2. Ensure physical and psychological safety and integrity of the people who are protesting for a social cause in a peaceful manner;
3. Halt the ongoing work at the Koodankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP) and the following steps must be taken immediately;
4. Hear the opinions and preferences of the project-affected people in an open, transparent and democratic manner to understand the fears and concerns of the people;
5. Constitute an independent national committee to study the issues of geology, hydrology, oceanography and seismology involved in the Koodankulam nuclear power plant;

6. Provide complete and truthful information to the local people and the citizens of India about nuclear waste that would be produced at the Koodankulam plants and its management;
7. Honour and respect the local people's right who are protesting in a peaceful and nonviolent against the Koodankulam Nuclear Power Plant and other related issues.

Looking forward to your immediate action in this regard,

Yours sincerely,

Henri Tiphagne

Hon'ble National Working Secretary

Human Rights Defenders Alert – India