

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

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Dear Sir,

*Sub: HRD Alert - India - Urgent Appeal for Action - Tamil Nadu /
Kancheepuram: Violent threats issued to activists for protesting the recent
caste violence instigated by PMK - 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 violent threats issued to activists of Makkal Mandram, an organization that has been protesting the recent caste violence instigated by political parties, by unidentified goons allegedly affiliated to Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) and its associates.

Perpetrators: Unidentified Youth allegedly affiliated to Pattali Makkal Katchi PMK) and its associate groups

Date and Time of Incident: 12th December 2012, 06.30 p.m.

Activists: Activists from the organization Makkal Mandram

According to the information that we received from Makkal Mandram, an organization that works based in Kancheepuram, a northern district of Tamil Nadu, India, violent threats, including that of rape, have been issued against the women activists of Makkal Mandram.

Background:

In the aftermath of the marriage of a Dalit girl to a youth belonging to the Vanniyar community and the subsequent suicide of the girl's father, attacks were unleashed on Dalit households in Dharmapuri in early November this year. Vanniyar Sangam and Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), an electoral party in Tamil Nadu which has its vote-base among the Vanniyar community (which is classified under MBC) was responsible for the arson in which over 400 dalits houses were destroyed. Kaduvetti Guru, MLA from PMK had been making hate speeches against dalit youths in meetings held at Mamallapuram (in Kancheepuram District) and Dharmapuri before this attack. He made virulent speeches against love marriages, especially those in which Vanniyar girls married Dalit youths and exhorted Vanniyar youths to teach these dalit boys a lesson. The Dharmapuri arson is reminiscent of the Gujarat Pogrom in terms of the mobs involved (crowds of more than 1000 persons attacked Dalit villages with just 50 to 100 households).

Many parties and organizations across Tamil Nadu condemned the PMK for these violent actions. Makkal Mandram also condemned PMK for unleashing caste atrocities on the Dalits by putting up posters in Kancheepuram and also by participating in a protest meeting organized by Viduthalai Siruthaigal Katchi (VCK) in Mamallapuram. Makkal Mandram demanded that the persons responsible for these attacks be arrested immediately.

On 9th of December, 2012 evening, Ambedkar Valavan, Joint District Secretary of VCK in Kancheepuram was hacked to death by a gang of five persons at Rettai Mandapam, a busy square in town at 8.00 pm in full public view. His funeral was held on the 11th in Kancheepuram. Thousands of people gathered for the funeral procession. The complaint lodged by VCK has named Sridhar's gang as being responsible for this killing. Sridhar is known as the

uncrowned liquor king of Kancheepuram. Sridhar is a Vanniyar who was earlier in PMK. After an encounter threat by the previous regime, he joined the DMK. He is presently in jail facing some other charges. It is said that each time this he went to jail a few heads would roll in Kancheepuram. In the funeral procession, slogans were raised demanding the arrest of persons responsible for the murder. Thol. Thirumavalavan, VCK leader addressed the crowd and reiterated the demands. Makkal Mandram also participated in the funeral.

Incident:

On the 12th of December, 2012 morning, at about 11.00 a.m., a group of more than 500 PMK members and mercenaries gathered at the Kancheepuram Collectorate office to give a memo to the District Collector. First they assembled outside the office and had a meeting. They used a horn mike. They allegedly had this meeting even after permission was denied. A few policemen who were present were content to watch without interrupting the proceedings. At the meeting, the speakers made several violent threats, including that of rape, against the women activists of Makkal Mandram. They accused that Makkal Mandram indulges in Katta Panchayats (kangaroo courts - local coercive arbitration forums in Tamil Nadu, where both parties to the dispute pay the arbitrator to resolve the dispute), that the Commune is built on Porambokku (Govt.) land and hence should be razed etc. They demanded that the Collector should ban Makkal Mandram or else they would take action against Makkal Mandram. Some speakers exhorted a mob to go and attack the Makkal Mandram commune.

Makkal Mandram says that a simple verification would reveal these to be completely untrue. Later that evening, around 6.30 p.m. several shirtless youths were seen roaming on motor bikes close to their commune. Many strangers had been making their way to their village that day. They glared at the Makkal Mandram staff and made threatening gestures. It is noteworthy that Makkal Madram also houses young children in our commune. They are affected by these intimidations. Makkal Mandram says that PMK, Vanniyar

Sangam and Sridhar's gang should be held solely responsible in case anything happens to Makkal Mandram activists.

Makkal Mandram informs that VCK activists and other media persons too have been threatened with dire consequences for speaking out against caste atrocities in Dharmapuri.

HRDA condemns the threats issued to the activists and the horrendous politics of caste hatred unleashed by PMK as this can be an effective tool to counter their flawed electoral strategy.

Appeal

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

1. The physical and psychological safety and integrity of the social activists of Makkal Mandram is guaranteed
2. The persons who issued the threats and intimidated the activists are identified and brought to book
3. The Govt. of Tamil Nadu takes necessary steps to bring the persons responsible for the Dharmapuri Arson to book.
4. All necessary steps are taken to guarantee the professional and personal freedom of the activists of Makkal Mandram
5. To ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments ratified by India.
6. To 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

Honorary Working Secretary

Human Rights Defenders Alert - India