

Human Rights Defenders Alert - India

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The Chairperson,
Odisha Human Rights Commission,
Toshali Bhawan (2nd Floor), Satyanagar,
PO: Satyanagar,
Bhubaneswar-751007
Email: ohrc@nic.in

Dear Sir,

Sub: HRD Alert - India - Urgent Appeal for Action – Odisha: Brutal attack on Prafulla Samantara, senior activist and National Convener, NAPM and Lingraj Azad, Samajwadi Jan Parishad in Bolangir station - 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 brutal attack of Mr. Prafulla Samantara, senior activist and National Convener, NAPM and Lingraj Azad, Samajwadi Jan Parishad made by the President of Bolangir Lower Suktel Action Committee and his supporters in Odisha on Wednesday, 26 June 2013.

About the Human Rights Defender under attack:

Prafulla Samantara, is a senior activist and National Convener of the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM)

Lingraj Azad belongs to the Samajwadi Jan Parishad

The Perpetrators: President of Bolangir Lower Suktel Action Committee and his supporters

Date and Time of Incident: On the night of 26th June 2013.

Place of Incident: Bolangir region, Odisha.

Source of Information: Email received from NAPM India

Incident:

On Sunday, 26 June 2013, Prafulla Samantara, senior activist and National Convener, National Alliance of People's Movement (NAPM) and Lingraj Azad, Samajwadi Jan Parishad were attacked at Bolangir Station, while returning from a Padyatra organised by the people opposing Lower Suktel Project in the region. They were attacked by the President of Bolangir Lower Suktel Action Committee and his supporters. It has to be noted here that Lower Suktel Action Committee is the group which supports commencement of the project.

A section of the Bolangir press and local police rushed to the spot and rescued them. Prafulla Samantara has returned to Bhubaneswar. The protestors never expected the President of the Action Committee Mr. Gopaljee Panigrahi to resort to undemocratic and brutal methods to express his anger and frustration.

Lower Suktel Project is one of the hundreds of projects being implemented in name of development in Odisha which is displacing the adivasis, workers, and farmers, in favour of the capitalists. The project got its environment clearance during the 1980s, but no construction started after that. The government has spent a large amount of money on paper on the rehabilitation of the displaced people. In 2013, the govt. tried to start the construction by forcefully acquiring the land but due to strong protest and resistance of the people they could not do it. Villagers were even brutally attacked but protests have continued. National Alliance of People's Movement supports their struggle for a dignified livelihood and to save their land, water and forest from forceful acquisition.

Background Information:

Prafulla Samantara is one of the most visible activists of Odisha, playing an active role in supporting various people's movements like the anti-POSCO

movement, the anti-Vedanta movement and many other struggles in Odisha. He is also a petitioner to the Supreme Court's committee to protect Niyamgiri as well as a petitioner for the Saxena Committee whose report forced the Ministry of Environment and Forests to suspend the clearance for Vedanta. Lingaraj Bhai is a renowned peasant leader and Secretary of Samajwadi Jan Parishad.

We understand that the recent attacks and many other previous attacks on the life of Prafulla Samantara is based on the committed action and writings of him, against the massive ecological destruction and displacement initiated by the industrialists, capitalists with the help of the State Government.

The struggle of people in defence of their livelihood and natural resources will continue and grow in strength with support from people's movements across the country.

Appeal

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

- All necessary measures are taken to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Prafulla Samantara and Lingraj Azad
- Odisha government desists from further acquisition in the area, since water will no longer be used for irrigation but for meeting the needs of the industry.
- Odisha Government also stops dividing and supporting a section of people pitching them against their own fellow beings.
- All necessary measures are taken to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of five human rights defenders, one of whom is a woman
- 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 in all circumstances.

- Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments ratified by India is guaranteed

Looking forward to your immediate action in this regard,

Yours sincerely,



Henri Tiphagne

Honorary Working Secretary

Human Rights Defenders Alert – India

Copies to:

Mr. Naveen Patnaik

Chief Minister, Odisha

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