

Human Rights Defenders Alert - India

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The Chairperson
National Human Rights Commission
Manav Adhikar Bhawan,
Block-C, GPO Complex, INA,
New Delhi – 110 023.
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Dear Sir,

Sub: *HRD Alert - India - Urgent Appeal for Action – West Bengal: Human rights defender physically assaulted by medical staff - 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 assault of Mr. Azimuddin Sarkar by medical staff during a visit to a hospital to document the testimony of a victim of police torture.

Source of Information on the Incident:

MASUM, a non-governmental human rights organisation based in Howrah, Kolkata, West Bengal and Frontline Defenders

About the Human Rights Defender under attack:

Azimuddin Sarkar is a District Monitor in Murshidabad District, West Bengal for MASUM, a non-governmental human rights organisation based in Howrah, Kolkata, West Bengal.

The Perpetrators:

Several staff members of Lalbagh Sub Divisional Hospital

Date of Incident:

September 16, 2013

Time of Incident:

3.30 PM

Place of Incident:

Lalbagh Sub Divisional Hospital

Incident

According to the information received, on 16 September, around 3:30 PM, Mr. Sarkar went to Lalbagh Sub Divisional Hospital, in order to record the statement of a victim of police torture and photographically document the signs of torture / ill-treatment on his body. The victim in question had been beaten in police custody after his arrest during skirmishes in the village of Durgapur.

As the human rights defender was speaking to the torture victim, he was suddenly pinned down by several members of the hospital staff who then punched, kicked and slapped him in front of the public while verbally abusing him. He was also threatened with dire consequences if he was seen at the hospital again. They then locked him in the ward master's room, where he was again beaten. Azimuddin Sarkar did, however, manage to make a phone call to MASUM's offices. MASUM staff contacted the police at Lalbagh Police Station and eventually Azimuddin Sarkar was released at around 4.00 PM.

Background:

Azimuddin Sarkar has in the past repeatedly been targeted with police threats and intimidation. Reports of this latest incident indicate that the assault on Azimuddin Sarkar is likely to be the direct result of his activities investigating cases of torture by the police, and that local authorities were involved. Therefore HRDA is concerned at the news that Azimuddin Sarkar is still being targeted with assault and intimidation.

Appeal

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

- A thorough, impartial and immediate investigation into the assault on human rights defender Azimuddin Sarkar with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards is carried out
- All necessary measures are taken to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Mr. Azimuddin Sarkar and members of his family
- 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Henri Tiphagne', with a horizontal line underneath.

Henri Tiphagne
Honorary Working Secretary
Human Rights Defenders Alert - India