

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 – Gujarat: Activists arrested for peaceful protest against the Sardar Patel Statue and the associated Project - 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 arrest of prominent activists of Gujarat on the 30th of October 2013 for peacefully protesting against the 'Statue of Unity' and the associated Project of the Modi Government, which would heavily impact the people and the environment in the area.

Source of Information on the Incident:

A mail circulated by Paryavaran Suraksha Samiti dated 31 October 2013.

About the Human Rights Defenders under attack:

Rohit Prajapati, Trupti Shah, Amrish Brahmbhatt, and Sudhir Binniwale, who are human rights defenders from Gujarat who have been known for their activism in issues of human rights violations in the State.

The Perpetrators:

The State

Gujarat Police

Date of Incident:

30 October 2013

Place of Incident:

Rajpipla, Gujarat

Incident

Narendra Modi, the Chief Minister of the State of Gujarat has been involved over the past three years in efforts to build, near the Sardar Sarovar Dam, a massive statue of Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel. The Statue, on reaching completion will be of 597 feet height, far bigger than the Statue of Liberty. The proposal is also for a project involving a bridge connecting the statue on Sadhu Island to the bank of the Narmada River, a memorial, visitor centre buildings, a memorial garden, a hotel, a convention centre, an amusement park, research centres and institutes.

Villagers of Kevadia and a number of other nearby places which will be impacted heavily by the said project are opposed to all this. Activists of socialist movements, trade unionists, environmental activists, and local people, have pointed out that the Kevadia Area Development Authority (KADA), a body under the government of Gujarat, have clearly projected plans to turn the place into a tourist spot. In order to do so, Heads of Panchayats (Village Councils) of 52 villages got letters from the KADA demanding that they agree to hand over their villages for tourism purpose or face consequences.

This area is one where six villages had been compelled to hand over their land back in the early 1960s for the Sardar Sarovar Dam, to build the Staff Colony, Government Offices and Guest House.

Building the Statue and the project that goes along with it will deprive the tribal people further of their land, livelihood, and forest. As a result, they have been fighting Modi for a considerable time. It had been declared that on 31st October, Sardar Patel's birth anniversary, Modi would lay the Foundation Stone of the 'Statue of Unity'. Protestors in a peaceful manner planned a day long hunger strike in a private place, regarding which a public notice had been issued.

But raids were carried out on the evening of 30th October 2013. Rohit Prajapati, Trupti Shah, Amrish Brahmhatt, and Sudhir Binniwale, widely known activists of Gujarat, who were travelling from Vadodara to Rajpipla were apprehended at Rajpipla and forcibly confined in a house without any reason being given. It has further been reported that a significant number of people have been arrested from at least seven villages. The full list of the names of the arrested is not yet known. However, this includes Lakhan Musafir, Dharendra Soneji, Dipen Desai, Rameshbhai Tadv from Indravarna village, Shaileshbai Tadv from Vagadia village, Vikrambhai Tadv from Kevadia.

Appeal

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

- The arrested activists and villagers who were protesting peacefully are released immediately without any charges.
- All necessary measures are taken to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of all the arrested activists and their families.
- Measures are taken to ensure that due measures are taken against the Police who apprehended the activists in violation of their freedom of expression.
- 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