

Human Rights Defenders Alert - India

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23 April 2014

Shri A. K. Parashar,
Focal Point - Human Rights Defenders,
National Human Rights Commission,
Manav Adhikar Bhawan,
Block-C, GPO Complex, INA,
New Delhi – 110 023
Email: hrd-nhrc@nic.in

Dear Sir,

***Sub: HRD Alert - India - Urgent Appeal for Action – Maharashtra: RTI Activist
Commits Suicide – 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 over the alleged suicide of a prominent RTI activist Mr. Vilas Dattatreya Bavarkar in Chakan, Pune in the west Indian state of Maharashtra last month.

Source of Information on the Incident:

Communications dated 21 April 2014 from the National Campaign for People's Right to Information.

About the Human Rights Defender under attack:

Vilas Dattatreya Bavarkar was a Pune based Right to Information Activist

The Perpetrators:

- Persons who could potentially be affected from the incriminating information sought by the late activist
- The State which failed to protect anti-corruption crusaders like Mr. Bavarkar

Date of Incident:

25th of March, 2014

Place of Incident:

Chakam, Pune, Maharashtra

Incident

Prominent RTI activist Mr. Vilas Dattatreya Bavarkar in Chakan, Pune allegedly committed suicide in March 2014. According to media reports, in his suicide note he is said to have blamed several persons, whose illegitimate interests were adversely affected by his RTI interventions, for pushing him towards taking this extreme step.

It is a matter of serious concern that Maharashtra continues to top the list of States where RTI users and activists demanding greater transparency and accountability in public affairs are targeted in this manner or physically assaulted or simply eliminated through acts of murder. The State Government of Maharashtra has a special responsibility towards protecting anti-corruption crusaders and whistle-blowers like the Late Mr. Bavarkar from coming to harm.

However when unscrupulous elements succeed in harming such civic-minded citizens, it reflects the failure of the State to ensure the practical realisation of the national motto '*satyameva jayate*' (truth alone triumphs).

Appeal :

We, therefore urge you to immediately take necessary steps to ensure that the concerned authorities

1. Ensure prompt and fast track investigation of this case to identify all persons guilty of abetting Mr. Bavarkar's suicide and to bring them to book;

2. Inquire into all cases of corruption and mismanagement of public funds exposed by the Late Mr. Bavarkar and to order a special audit of all developmental works and governmental decision making processes which he targeted through his RTI interventions
3. Provide adequate protection to Mr. Bavarkar's family.
4. Ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments ratified by India.

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 it.

Henri Tiphagne

Honorary National Working Secretary