



Human Rights Defenders Alert- India

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Shri A. K. Parashar,

National Focal Point - Human Rights Defenders & Joint Registrar

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 - Appeal for Action – Chhattisgarh: Tribal rights activist and human rights defender, Ms. Soni Sori receives anonymous letter threatening her to burn alive and parading her naked in Geedam town of Dantewada district in the state of Chhattisgarh – Regarding Greetings from Human Rights Defenders Alert - India!

HRD Alert - India is a forum of Human Rights Defenders for Human Rights Defenders. It endeavors to initiate actions on behalf of Human Rights Defenders under threat or with security concerns.

We are writing to express our deep concern and alarm regarding the anonymous letter received by tribal rights activist and human rights defender Ms. Soni Sori of Chhattisgarh. The sender of the letter has threatened to burn her alive if she entered the Bijapur district in Chhattisgarh. Ms. Soni Sori has also received three hand written pamphlets which branded her a Maoist sympathiser.

Source of Information on the Incident:

The Regional Coordinator of HRDA for East of India

A communication with the HRD, Ms. Soni Sori

Media Reports

Status of the Human Rights Defender:

Ms. Soni Sori was a teacher in a government-run tribal school in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district. Coming from a small village Sameli of Dantewada in south Bastar she later became a tribal rights activist. Soni Sori symbolises the plight of

Bastar tribals — tortured, humiliated and caught in the conflict between Maoists and the state.

A human rights defender, Ms. Soni Sori is currently a member of Aam Aadmi Party. Branded as a “Maoist” by the Chhattisgarh police she has been fighting for the rights of poor tribals or Adivasis of Chhattisgarh against police atrocities. Soni Sori was arrested by the Delhi Police's Crime Branch for Chhattisgarh Police in 2011 on charges of acting as a conduit for Maoists. During her imprisonment, she was allegedly tortured and sexually assaulted by Chhattisgarh state police. By April 2013, the courts had acquitted her in six of the eight cases filed against her due to lack of evidence. She has been at the forefront of many tribal movements and had recently visited the Maoist strongholds of Bijapur and Sukma to expose alleged sexual assaults on tribal women by security forces in the name of search operations. Because of her work she has been falsely implicated in many fabricated criminal cases by the police. She has been subjected to harassment and intimidation and even faces the threat of being eliminated.

The Perpetrators:

Inspector General of Police, Bastar Range Mr. SRP Kalluri.

Date of Incident:

On 4th Feb 2016.

Place of Incident:

Geedam town, Dantewada district, Chhattisgarh

Incident detail:

According to sources on 4th Feb, 2016 in the morning, Ms. Soni Sori's family members found an anonymous letter and three hand written pamphlets while cleaning the residence. The letter had carried a message warning Ms. Soni that if she enters in the Bastar area then they will burn her alive and parade her naked.

It is alleged that the local police have lodged seven false and fabricated cases against Ms.Soni Sori in the past. Out of those seven cases she was acquitted by the court in six cases. Later she was arrested and was put in jail for two years. After her release she again started working against the police atrocities on innocent adivasi villagers. She was called by IG SRP Kalluri who offered a cash award of rupees

twenty-five lakhs. This award was being offered by the present Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh. In return of the award she was being requested not to oppose and agitate against the government. Ms. Soni Sori refused to oblige the state government by rejecting the offer. The rejection seemed to have offended the IGP of Bastar region and to take revenge of his offended pride he instigated the local business community to oppose and almost drive Ms. Soni Sori her out from Bastar area. But even then she continued her intervention in cases of atrocities on adivasis by the police agencies in the region. Recently in a matter of sexually assault on 40 adivasi women, she had organized a press conference and complaint to the National Commission of Women. On her complaint a member of NCW visited the region to investigate the matter personally. All these developments were a cause of alarm for the Chhattisgarh police. Now in retaliation the local police are using the new intimidatory tactical move by engaging and providing support to unknown local persons in the town to harass and threaten Ms. Soni Sori to stop her to continue her legitimate work. Ms. Soni Sori has accused IG Mr. SRP Kalluri of instigating Bastar residents to send the threatening letter. However, the police have denied any such links. Ms. Sori had intimated the local police station about the letter and threat to her but the police have not responded to her. The latest attempt to intimidate and threaten her appears to be in reprisal for Ms. Soni Sori's work as a human rights defender.

Appeal:

We, therefore urge you to immediately take necessary steps and ensure that this Hon'ble Commission to urgently:

- Order an immediate, thorough, transparent, effective and impartial investigation into the above-mentioned incident involving threat issued to the life of tribal rights activist and human rights defender Ms. Soni Sori;
- Take immediate action on the perpetrators, in this case Inspector General of Police, Bastar region for using intimidatory tactics to threaten the life of Ms. Soni Sori and using all provisions of law to ensure that the defender is not intimidated, threatened and attacked in future;
- Along with local district officials guarantees in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of Ms. Sori and her family members as they

continue to be under risk of further harassment from the perpetrators and give this assurance to the NHRC of India in writing immediately and urgently, especially because the growing trend of arbitrary and unwarranted restrictions on the basic freedoms supplemented with the impunity of the security forces threatens the very foundations of democracy;

- Put an end to all acts of attack and harassment against all human rights defenders like Ms. Soni Sori in the State of Chhattisgarh to ensure that in all circumstances they carry out their activities as defenders of human rights without fear of reprisals, and free of all restrictions including police and judicial harassment;
- Takes steps to conform to the provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 9, 1998, especially:
 - Article 1, which states that “everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels;
 - Article 12.2, which provides that “the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration”;
- Recommend urgently and speedily during the pendency of this complaint, the SHRC in Chhattisgarh to also take necessary steps to establish a state focal point for HRDs in order to ensure that HRDs have a new protection mechanism in their own state;
- Recommend urgently and speedily during the pendency of this complaint, the NHRC to convene a meeting of all state human rights institutions in the state [the SHRC, the SCW, the SCPCR, the SCM, the SIC, State Commissioner for PWDs etc.] to ensure that a coordinated strategy is developed within the State of Chhattisgarh for the protection of the rights of human rights defenders

- Recommend urgently and speedily during the pendency of this complaint, the State Government of Chhattisgarh in collaboration with the NHRC Focal Point on HRDs and the SHRC Chhattisgarh to provide sensitization training to law enforcement and security forces on the role and activities of human rights defenders as a matter of priority, with technical advice and assistance from relevant United Nations entities, NGOs and other partners;
- Recommend urgently and speedily during the pendency of this complaint, the State Government of Chhattisgarh in collaboration with the SHRC, Chhattisgarh to publicly acknowledge the importance and legitimacy of the work of human rights defenders, i.e. anyone who, “individually and in association with others, ... promote[s] and ... strive[s] for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels” (Art.1 of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders);
- More generally, ensures in all circumstances the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and with international human rights instruments ratified by India is strictly adhered to in the state of Chhattisgarh.

Looking forward to your immediate action in this regard,

Yours sincerely,



(Henri Tiphagne)

Honorary National Working Secretary