



Human Rights Defenders Alert - India

National Coordination Office

6, Vallabai Road, Chokkikulam, Madurai
625002. Tamil Nadu, INDIA

Tel: +91-9994368540 **Email:** hrda.india@gmail.com

March 27, 2016

**Justice (Retd.) H L Dattu,
Chairperson,
National Human Rights Commission,
Manav Adhikar Bhawan,
Block-C, GPO Complex,
INA, New Delhi – 110 023
Email: chairnhrc@nic.in**

Sub: HRD Alert - India – Urgent Appeal for Action - Seeking Hon'ble National Human Rights Commission's intervention in the case of threats and repeated attempts to harass and intimidate an independent researcher and woman Human rights defender Ms. Bela Bhati in Bastar district in the state of Chhattisgarh– Regarding

This is the second appeal on the continuous harassment and intimidation of Ms. Bela Bhatia and an earlier appeal was sent to the Hon'ble Commission on February 22, 2016.

Dear Sir,

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.

HRDA has been informed that on March 26, 2016, at around 4 PM, a large group of people, estimated to be around 100 in number, came to the village where Ms. Bela Bhatia lives. The group came there in four jeeps/cars, five autos and included men and women and as well as police personnel in plain clothes, a few of them were armed. The villagers had identified a few of them as they were from a neighbouring village.

The mob carried a banner with them and reached the house of Ms. Bela Bhatia who was not present there at that time. So they threatened the landlady of Ms. Bhatia and asked her that why a “*Naxal Aatankwad*” had been allowed to rent a house here and intimidated her to evict Ms. Bhatia from the place. The mob then took a rally around the hamlet and had raised slogans like “*Bela Bhatia Muradabad*” and distributed leaflets which had falsely accused her of being a “*Naxal Dalal*” and contained the slogan “*Bastar Chodo, Bastar Chodo, Bela Bhatia Bastar Chodo*”. One of the member of the mob has been identified as Ms. Laxmi Kashyap who is believed to be one of the leaders of *Mahila Ekta Manch* and was also involved in the shouting slogans against Ms. Bhatia earlier this month.

It is being apprehended that *Mahila Ekta Manch* is a wing of *Samajik Ekta Manch*, a Jagdalpur based vigilante forum, supported by the Chhattisgarh Police, allegedly to counter Naxal influence and activities in Bastar region. The above mentioned vigilante groups had previously followed the same intimidating and threatening tactics on several other women human rights defenders in the Bastar region including tribal activist Ms. Soni Sori, lawyers Ms. Shalini Gera and Isha Khandelwal and journalist Ms. Malini Subramniam.

Ms. Bela Bhatia is an independent researcher and academician, working for Adivasi women’s rights in district Bastar, Chhattisgarh. She has also been documenting and filing cases of human rights violations by the security forces. She has been part of several fact-finding teams which investigated recent cases of excess by the security forces in Bastar. As part of a team from Women against Sexual Violence and State Repression (WSS), she co-authored a recent report on looting and sexual violence by the security forces in Bijapur, South Chhattisgarh.

We believe in the spirit of the Constitution of India which envisages that no one should be denied their legitimate right to work. In the case of above mentioned woman human rights defender we anticipate that are deliberate attempts being made to delegitimise her work and thereby increase her vulnerability. We would like to quote the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 9, 1998, especially, 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”.

Appeals –

- Given the nature of the systematic attacks, threats to the lives and works of the women human rights defenders by the State and State sponsored vigilante groups, we humbly request the Hon’ble NHRC to take steps to guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of the woman human rights defender Ms. Bela Bhatia who is under risk of further severe reprisals from the perpetrators.
- Appoint an independent high level fact finding team in the incidents of harassment and threats to the life of woman human rights defender Ms. Bela Bhatia and other human rights defenders who include activists, journalists, researchers and lawyers who are threatened and harassed in the state of Chhattisgarh. This is urgently required given the escalating attacks by State and State sponsored vigilante groups in the recent one year. It is also urged that the report of the investigation undertaken by NHRC’s investigation wing earlier this month to be released.

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)

National Working Secretary

Copies to:

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
Email: hrd-nhrc@nic.in

Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders,

Mr. Michel Forst
c/o Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights – Palais Wilson
United Nations Office at Geneva
CH 1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland
Email: urgent-action@ohchr.org jgazyev@ohchr.org defenders@ohchr.org

Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)

66/2, Pan Road, Silom Bang Rak,
Bangkok, 10500 Thailand.

Email: hrd@forum-asia.org

Joan Audierne

Head of Secretariat
Protectdefenders.eu
rue de la Sablonniere, 25
1000 Bruxelles
Email: jaudierne@riseup.net

Front Line - The International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

Second Floor Grattan House
Temple Road , Blackrock
Co. Dublin
Ireland
Email : info@frontlinedefenders.org

OMCT International Secretariat

PO Box 21

8, rue du Vieux-Billard

1211 Geneva 8

Switzerland

Phone: + 41 22 809 4939

Fax: + 41 22 809 4929

E-mail: omct@omct.org

WORLDWIDE MOVEMENT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

FIDH HEADQUARTERS

17 Passage de la Main d'Or 75011 Paris

0033 1 43 55 25 18