



# HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS' ALERT - INDIA

NATIONAL SECRETARIAT

No.32, Besant Road, Chokkikulam, Madurai - 625 002, Tamil Nadu, India.  
P: +91-452-2531874 & 2539520 Fax: +91-452- 2531874 Mobile: 99943-68540  
E.mail: hrdaindia@gmail.com Web: www.hrdaindia.org

**August 08, 2017**

**To,**

**Shri Srinivasa Kammath**

National Focal Point - Human Rights Defenders & Deputy Registrar

National Human Rights Commission

Manav Adhikar Bhawan, Block-C, GPO Complex, INA,

New Delhi – 110 023

Email: [hrd-nhrc@nic.in](mailto:hrd-nhrc@nic.in)

***Sub: HRD Alert - India - Urgent Appeal for Action – Madhya Pradesh:  
Violent police actions and illegal arrest of social activists and human  
rights defenders Ms. Medha Patkar and five others at Dhar district,  
while they were on a peaceful indefinite hunger strike opposing the  
forceful eviction of nearly 40,000 families due to Sardar Sarovar Dam  
project- Regarding***

Dear Sir,

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 now writing to express our grave concern regarding forceful arrest and detention of social activists including Ms. Medha Patkar from the place where they were holding a peaceful protests and hunger strikes in Dhar, Madhya Pradesh.

**Source of Information on the Incident:**

National Coordinator of HRDA

Media Reports

## **Status of Human Rights Defender:**

Ms. Medha Patkar is a social activist working on various crucial political and economical issues raised by adivasis, dalits, farmers, labourers and women facing injustice. She is the founder member of 31 years old people's movement in the three states; Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat; Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) engaged in struggle for justice to the dam projects affected people, challenging development paradigm and in reconstruction including educational work. She is one of the founders of National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), an alliance of hundreds of progressive people's organisations.

She is on a hunger strike since July 27, 2017 along with twelve other social activists against the government's decision to evict the villagers and farmers around Sardar Sarovar dam project without providing place for them rehabilitate.

## **The Perpetrators:**

Madhya Pradesh Administration and Police

## **Date of Incident:**

August 7, 2017

## **Place of Incident:**

Chikhhalda village, Dhar district, Madhya Pradesh

## **Background**

In 1985, the World Bank agreed to finance the Sardar Sarovar Dam in the state of Gujarat, India with a contribution of \$450 million without consulting the indigenous communities that were to be displaced. There was no proper impact assessment of the project which had the potential threat to displace thousands of families who mostly were dalits and tribals.

In 1987, construction began on the Sardar Sarovar dam and there was not enough land available for redistribution, amenities were of low quality, and the settlers had difficulty adjusting to new environments. It was in response to this that Save Narmada Movement (Narmada Bachao Andolan – NBA) begun 31 years ago in India, to lead to a discourse and push for an alternate, least destructive development model. This mega project would result in the displacement of millions of tribals, farmer, etc., submerge lakhs of hectares

of fertile and irrigable farm land and rich forests, permanently cause salinity and therefore create deserts in the presently fertile and productive areas in the Narmada valley.

The Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) through its struggle covering 31 years has managed to get the promised land for land rehabilitation for approximately 14,000 tribal and dalit farmers and their families – especially those from Gujarat and Maharashtra. However, the status of rehabilitation is shockingly slow and shameful when one considers that submergence started in 1995 and in 2016, more than 40,000 families are still awaiting their rightful rehabilitation. Farmers and their families were forcefully made to sacrifice their homes, farms and forest resource base in the name of “development” and progress of the country.

Due to NBA’s continual critique and exposure about the ill effects of Sardar Sarovar Dam project, in the year 1990 the World Bank formed an independent review committee, which found flaws in the resettlement and rehabilitation of those who will be displaced. As a result, World Bank withdrew from the project in 1993. Yet, the Government of India proceeded with the project without any reassessment.

In 2000, World Commission of Dams (WCD) with the support of World Bank and Asian Development Bank, came out with a report titled “Dams and Development: A New Framework for Decision-making” in 2000. The Government of India did not follow any of the recommendations and continued with the construction of the dams.

### **Recent Developments**

Recently the State Government of Madhya Pradesh, issued orders directing the affected families in the submergence area of the dam, close to Narmada river in Madhya Pradesh to vacate their dwellings by July 31, 2017 but has provided no rehabilitation to them which is in complete violation of the Supreme Court order. The move of the government to increase the height of the dam from 122 meters to 139 meters has caused unexplainable misery to large number of people. 178 villages and a town will be submerged in Madhya Pradesh. This move, for so called development, will render 40,000 families displaced and with no rehabilitation.

To protest this move, all the affected villagers, internationally acclaimed environmentalist, social activist and member of the World Commission on Dams – Ms. Medha Patkar along with 12 other project affected women is on indefinite hunger strike since July 27, 2017. The indefinite hunger strike is against the government’s decision to raise the height of

Sardar Sarovar Dam and close its gates without ensuring rehabilitation of 40,000 of people who have been living in the areas that will be submerged due to this decision.

About 40,000 families, currently residing in the submergence area of the Sardar Sarovar Dam, including - thousands of dalits and tribals are being denied their legal right to cultivable land based rehabilitation. Thousands of landless workers, fishermen and women, potters, small traders etc. are being deprived of their livelihood without rehabilitation as their well-settled flourishing villages are being submerged.

As part of rehabilitation, farmers have been mostly promised barren and non-cultivable lands or meagre cash compensation. The resettlement sites are not in a state of habitation including no infrastructure for education, health and access to other basic rights. The judgements and orders of the High Court and the Supreme Court are being violated, hundreds of complaints are still pending before the grievance redressal authorities and the decision to close the dam gates without rehabilitation is nothing short of judicial contempt.

Several reports of expert committees appointed by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, have proven that the clearance conditions have been violated. Though millions of rupees as claimed by the Government of India, have been spent on command area development, compensatory afforestation, health impacts, fisheries, seismic risks, archaeological impacts etc., the requisite studies and safeguard measures, as per law, are not in place.

There is uncertainty prevailing over the eviction of families furthering the tensions and fears of the district administration resorting to forceful eviction with the help of police. As the members of NBA including Ms. Medha Patkar are on continuous hunger strike demanding the withdrawal of eviction by the government, their health conditions are also severely worsening.

**Current Incident detail:**

According to sources, Ms. Medha Patkar and other protestors have been forcefully lifted from the Dharna site on 12th day of her fast, i.e. August 7, 2017. Along with her five other fasting protestors have also been arrested, remaining six of them continue their fast. Nearly 2000 police force was mobilised who came down heavily on the peaceful ongoing meeting. They used force to break the pandals and when women protestors tried resisting the arrest of Ms. Medha, they were beaten and manhandled by male policemen. Several have suffered injury. They broke the stage, the pandals, chairs and rope fencing etc in the

protest site. It is shameful on the part of the Government that in 12 days they never felt it good enough to dialogue with the people but used force to finally arrest her.

HRDA strongly condemns this action and demands NHRC to take immediate action against this police action and urges NHRC to ensure that Medha Patkar's and other HRDs' right to peaceful protest is ensured.

**Appeal:**

We **therefore** urge you to immediately

- Order an immediate, thorough, transparent, effective and impartial investigation into the above-mentioned illegal arrest of HRDs;
- NHRC while leading an independent investigation should visit the spot and talk to the HRDs and affected families. Based on the independent investigation, NHRC should come out with a list of recommendations to the Government of India and Government of Madhya Pradesh addressing the concerns of the affected families;
- Immediate release of the activists including Ms. Medha Patkar and ensure no further hindrance is given by state police and the government so that they could continue their peaceful protests;
- Take necessary and strict action on the police personnel who illegally and arbitrarily arrested the HRDs from the protest site;
- Put an end to all acts of attack and harassment against all human rights defenders in Madhya Pradesh to ensure that in all circumstances they carry out their activities as defenders of human rights without any hindrances;
- Ensure fundamental rights of free speech and association guaranteed by Article 19 and right to life and personal liberty granted by Article 21 of the Indian Constitution;

Looking forward to your immediate action in this regard,

Yours Sincerely,



(Henri Tiphagne)

National Working Secretary