



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS' ALERT - INDIA

NATIONAL SECRETARIAT

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February 23, 2018

To

Mr. 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

Dear Sir,

Sub: *HRD Alert - India - Appeal for Action – Assam: Woman human rights defender Ms. Christina Pyrtuh and her family assaulted and driven away from her house for raising voice against corruption in Assam – Regarding*

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 writing to express our grave concern over the assault and molestation of Women Human Rights Defender Christina Pyrtuh and her family and driven them out from home and their village for protesting against corruption in implementation of schemes under the local area development fund of the member of legislative assembly (MLA) of Assam representing their constituency Katigorah in the district of Cachar in Assam.

About the WHRD:

Ms. Cristina Pyrtuh is a woman human rights defender from the Khasi community of the village Baikham Punji, under Kushiarkul Gaon Panchayat in Cachar district, Assam. In spite of her cardiac illness, she has been active is working on the issue of corruption and embezzlement of government funds by elected representatives and authorities in her village. Her family includes 2 daughters of 15 and 11 years, 2 sons of 12 and 6 years and 70 years old mother.

Source of Information on the Incident:

- Communication from the WHRD Ms. Cristina Pyrtuh
- The Coordinator of HRDA for the North East of India
- Communication from member of Barak Human Rights Protection Committee (BHRPC)

The Perpetrators:

- Kushiarkul Gaon Panchayat authorities
- GP president Bablu

- Dilip Pyrtuh
- Jan-Mukhim
- Daboyomi Lamar
- Sidwel Suchiang
- Village headman Drickson Shyllain

Date of Incident:

Since January 5, 2018

Place of Incident:

Baikam Punji under Kushiarkul Gaon Panchayat authorities

Background Information

Baikam Punji is one of the very interior village under Kushiarkul Gaon Panchayat of Gumra area which is about 45 kilometres away from Silchar, the district-headquarters of Cachar. About 40 families with more than hundred people, mainly from Khashi community live there. The main source of livelihood of the inhabitants is traditional farming. Since it is a hilly area the only source of drinking water is a water reservoir constructed three years before. For primary health care service, a sub-center under Kalain Hospital has been set up in 2013 but it always remains closed and no doctor or staff have visited there since the construction.

Details of the Incident:

A huge corruption is allegedly going on in the implementation of different government schemes meant to be implemented by the Kushiarkul Gaon Panchayat Authorities. The only road through which they communicate from the village is a kaccha road. This year Rs. 29,80,000/- has been sanctioned by the local Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) from his MLA fund for construction of the road. According to Christina Pyrtuh there were allegations of gross corruption in the construction works of the said road sanctioned under the MLA fund.

Villagers of Baikam Punji organized a meeting at the 1618 No. Baikam Punji L.P.School on December 19, 2017. MLA Mr. Amar Chand Jain was present in the meeting. In the meeting Ms. Cristiana Pyrtuh raised her voice against corruption allegedly committed by the GP president Bablu Das in collaboration with some of the local people - Dilip Pyrtuh, Jan-Mukhim, Daboyomi Lamare, Sidwel Suchiang and the village headman Drickson Shyllain in the implementation of different government projects in the Punji. Ms. Pyrtuh along with other villagers Than-Mukhim, Fiden Kamen as well as the local teacher Mr. Banamali Prashad alleged that apart from the poor construction of the roads, Mr. Bablu Das and his accomplices also adopted corrupt practices during the distribution of houses under the Prime Minister Avas Yojona as they did earlier when it was known as Indira Avas Yojona. After taking bribe, they had given the financial assistance to Rumen Suchiang whose husband is a BSF personnel and who is the daughter of Jan-mukhim, one of their accomplices. Some family members of Dilip Pyrtuh also got the financial benefits. After listening to the allegations put forth by the WHRD and others, the MLA scolded the accused persons and instructed the villagers to remain in correspondence with him and inform him about any further malpractices.

The accused persons got very angry and annoyed at the protesters including Mrs Pyrtuh that they had complained to the MLA. They organized a meeting of their own in the village and asked the villagers to boycott and ostracize the protesters, Mrs Pyrtuh in particular. Then one of the accused Daboimi Lamare who is a neighbor of the Ms Pyrtuh started abusing her often after getting drunk. He asked her to leave the village otherwise he said he was going to make her life worse than hell by stopping the water connection to her house. Then on December 29, 2017 Ms. Pyrtuh saw that the pipe through which her family got water from the local water-reservoir was cut down. She complained to the villagers who suspected that the accused Daboymi Lamare did this as he had warned her. When asked he admitted that he did it indeed because the pipe went through his land and he said he would not allow it any more. The villagers then suggested Ms. Pyrtuh a new route to carry the water pipe to avoid the accused person's land. She bought new pipe and connected it through the way the villagers suggested. But on December 31, 2017 the new water pipe was damaged again. Because of this, she was forced to fetch water in pitcher by herself from a distant river without the pipe.

On January 1, 2018 two of the accused persons namely Daboy Lamare and Jan-mukhim again attacked Ms. Pyrtuh's house, vandalized in the yards, abused the victim family with filthy languages and threatened them with death. The perpetrator Daboy Lamare threatened the WHRD that, "I will flee to Bangladesh after killing you with my Do-nala and fouling the graveyard with the venom of your dead body." The whole night they remained near her house waiting for an opportunity to attack them. The victim family got very scared and sent words to the villagers for help, but nobody came forward this time. On January 2, 2018 Ms. Pyrtuh lodged a complaint to the police.

Following the complaint, the police registered an FIR in Katigorah Police Station with Case No. 08/18 and on that night the police came and arrested two of the accused namely Diboymi Lamare and Dilip Pyrtuh. However, the victim saw that Diboymi came back home that night itself and Dilip got released on the very next day.

After coming back home the accused persons got more enraged and they started a vicious campaign against Ms. Pyrtuh. They went door to door trying to manipulate the villagers saying that she didn't want the development of the village. Their campaign included attempt of her character assassination linking her with another person who also spoke out against them in the meeting.

On the other hand, due to shortage of drinking water the WHRD's family fell ill and Ms. Pyrtuh and her 2 sons were hospitalized in the Kalain Primary Health Center on January 3, 2018. They were suffering acute diarrhea along with severe dehydration. One of her sons Dennyster Pyrtuh was referred to Silchar Medical Collage, Silchar. But fortunately, with his medication the child showed improvement, so she took him back to thier house on the next day.

After returning to their house, some of the villagers informed her that they have called for one more meeting on 5 January, 2018 to settle the issue and she had to attend the meeting. She went there keeping in mind the well-being of her children and hoping that now at least they would get enough drinking water but it turned out to be more of a nightmare. When she went there one of the accused Shiduel Suchiang started clicking her photo without her consent and the other perpetrators started pressurizing her to withdraw the case and not to give any statement to the media. It is also says that

Shudiel Suchiang assaulted the WHRD in that meeting and also threatened her son Denyster Pyrtuh. Then on 5 January 2018 at about 7 P.M Jan Mukhim came with some of his accomplices whom the victim family could not recognize and pelted stones at the victim's house. The WHRD and her family had to run to a safe place nearby to save themselves. In the process her mother Ms. Stelbeda Pyrtuh narrowly escaped from a fatal stone. The accused persons went on abusing and threatening the whole family that they will kill them. The family had to spend the night in utmost fear and terror. On that morning after spending a whole sleepless night they had to leave the Punji for a safer shelter. But before that she filed another complaint to the Gumra Police Investigation Center on the incident of stone pelting and threatening but no actions have been taken by the police. Right now, they are living with a relative in Meghalaya temporarily. However, she regularly visits the Police Investigation Centre, Gumrah to know about the status of her case, although they did not pay any attention to her requests and no actions were taken as well.

She also met the Superintendent of Police, Cachar on January 23, 2018 and submitted a representation requesting for investigation of cases and for providing security to her and her family. Then, on 24 January 2018 the Investigation Officer of Gumrah Police Investigation Centre called her over the phone and asked her to go to the police station. She went there with her son Aryan at 1 PM in the noon but was asked to wait outside. She waited till 6 PM but none of the officers had enquired anything about the incident to her. She is a cardiac patient and as it was a cold weather she felt ill. And had serious breathing problems. The she was taken to a medical centre nearby in a serious condition and then she was then referred to the Silchar Medical College on the next day, but she opted to go to NEGRIMS in Shillong (Meghalaya) in view of threats to life and went there.

Ms. Pyrtuh and her family are staying in Meghalaya till today. The police are still inactive, and no charge-sheet has been filed yet and she and her family members are still facing the risk of further attack.

Appeal:

We, therefore urge you to immediately take necessary steps and:

- Order an immediate, independent, thorough, transparent, effective and impartial investigation into the above-mentioned incident of brutal attack and intimidation of WHRD Ms. Pyrtuh and her family members
- Ensure that adequate protection is being given to the WHRD and her family
- Order the state police officials to take necessary steps on her complaint against the perpetrators

Looking forward to your immediate action in this regard,

Yours sincerely,



Henri Tiphagne
National Working Secretary

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