



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: hrda.india@gmail.com Web: www.hrdaindia.org

Ref No: HRDA/North/DL/03/09/2019

September 03, 2019

To

Mr. Khaleel Ahmad

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 - Urgent Appeal for Action – New Delhi –Physical assault on Dalit human rights defenders who were protesting against the demolition of a temple in New Delhi – 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 now writing to express our grave concern over the physical assault on the Dalit protesters and illegal arrests of Dalit human rights defenders by Delhi police while holding a peaceful protest against the demolition of 60 years old temple on August 10, 2019.

Background of the incident:

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) on August 10, 2019 had demolished the 60-year-old temple structure and removed the statue of Ravidas. The temple is of Saint Ravidas, a fifteenth-century saint and poet revered by the Dalit community and is located in Tughlakabad, New Delhi. Ravidas, a proponent of social justice which is revered by the Indian Dalit community for his opposition to caste- based discrimination as he had challenged caste hierarchy in his teachings.

A protest was organised to demand the government to rebuild the temple in the same place by various Dalit human rights organisations of India including community members from 36 Dalit communities. The united protest was organised under the banner of Akhil Bharatiya Sant Shiromani Guru Ravidas Mandir Sanyukta Sanrakshshan Samiti, an umbrella body of various Dalit groups which was formed for this temple movement. The umbrella body comprised of All India Ambedkar Mahasabha (AIAM), Ravidasia Diaspora Community, Bhim Army and the Akhil Bhartiya Ravidasia Dharm Sangathan which jointly has started a campaign against the demolition of the temple. Large groups of Dalit community members came in from Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and other states to demand that the government hand over the concerned plot of land to the community and rebuild the temple.

Source of Information on the Incident:

- The Coordinator of HRDA for the North of India
- Media Reports

The Perpetrators:

Delhi Police, New Delhi

Date and Place of incident:

21 August, 2019

New Delhi.

Details of the Incident:

According to sources, on August 21, 2019 tens of thousands of persons belonging to Dalit community including members of various Dalit human rights organisations under the banner of *Akhil Bharatiya Sant Shiromani Guru Ravidas Mandir Sanyukta Sanrakshshan Samiti* organised a protest in Delhi against the demolition of a temple by the Delhi Development Authority. The members of Dalit community rallied from Ramlila Maidan towards the place where the temple was demolished. While the group were peacefully marching towards the location of the said temple, around 7 PM suddenly without any prior warning, personnel of Delhi Police used force on the protestors and used *lathis* (batons) brutally to disperse them. The police also used teargas and fired bullets into the air, leaving many protestors with injuries. Nearly 100 persons were arrested on charges of rioting, unlawful activities, assaulting public servant, damaging public property and causing injury to people under Section 147,

149, 186, 353, 332 of the Indian Penal Code registered at Govindpuri police station, New Delhi. Those detained include Dalit human rights defender Chandrashekhar Azad who also sustained injuries during physical assault by the police.

It is brought to the notice of this Commission that the present case is yet again an example of how the state through its law enforcement agencies is trying to stifle dissenting voices, curbing peaceful protestors and falsely criminalizing people who are critical of government opinion and policies so that they are deterred from criticizing government policies. This excessive and unjustifiable use of force was just to silence and deter any peaceful protest which once again violates fundamental rights and freedoms as guaranteed by the Indian Constitution.

Appeal

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

- Orders an immediate, thorough, transparent, effective and impartial investigation into the above-mentioned incident of brutal physical attack on members of Dalit community and arrest of Dalit human rights defenders and leaders of Dalit human rights organisations;
- Takes immediate legal action on the perpetrators in this case - personnel of Delhi police for the brutal assault and denial of the right to assemble and associate freely to register their protest to all the human rights defenders belonging to Dalit community who participated in the peaceful assembly and protest;
- Ensures that all charges against all Dalit human rights defenders including Mr. Chandrashekhar Azad are dropped and ensures their unconditional release without any further harm or abuse under police custody for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association to register their protest;

Looking forward to your immediate action in this regard,

Yours sincerely,



(Henri Tiphagne)

National Working Secretary