



# HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS' ALERT - INDIA

NATIONAL SECRETARIAT

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**Ref No: HRDA/East/CHA/17/09/2019**

**September 30, 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](mailto:hrd-nhrc@nic.in)

**Dear Sir,**

***Sub: HRD Alert - India - Urgent Appeal for Action - Chhattisgarh: Extra-judicial killing of Podiya Sori and Lachu Mandavi and False and fabricated FIR filed against human rights defenders; social activist Soni Sori, lawyer, researcher and tribal rights activist Bela Bhatia, Nanda, sarpanch of the village and her husband, Bhima, and 150-200 villagers of Kirandul village, for registering peaceful protest and complaint against the extra-judicial killings in Kirandul police station of Dantewada district, 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 regarding the false and fabricated FIRs filed against human rights defenders – social activist Soni Sori, researcher, lawyer and tribal rights activist Bela Bhatia, 150-200 villagers of Kirandul village and its sarpanch, Nanda and her husband, Bhima, at Kirandul police station in Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh. All of them are being targeted by the Chhattisgarh police for registering their peaceful protest against an alleged extrajudicial killing in fake encounter of innocent tribal villagers and securing the release of a tribal, Ajay Telam who has been kept in illegal police custody since September 13, 2019, in Dantewada district.

**Status of the Human Rights Defenders**

Ms. Soni Sori is a tribal rights activist and currently a member of Aam Aadmi Party. She has been fighting for the rights of poor tribal or Adivasis of Chhattisgarh against

police atrocities. Ms. Soni has challenged the unjustified police actions in Chhattisgarh state that has been engulfed in violence and conflict. 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.

Ms. Bela Bhatia is a human rights defender, lawyer, independent researcher and writer. Ms. Bhatia has constantly brought to light instances of rape and sexual assault by security forces in Chhattisgarh and provided assistance to the victims in filing complaints with the police. She has participated in several fact-finding missions and served on a Planning Commission appointed panel to 'examine challenges to governance in areas affected by left-wing extremism'. Prior to that, she had been engaged in extensive study of the Naxalite movement in Indian states such as Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

Ms. Nanda is the sarpanch of the Kirandul village, Dantewada.

Sources informed the HRDA that Podiya Sori and Lachu Mandavi were young and respected leaders from village Gumiyapal in Dantewada district who were active in the popular movement against the iron-ore mining operations in Nandaraj mountain in Kirandul, which is held sacred by the tribal in the region.

**Source of Information on the Incident:**

The Coordinator of HRDA for the East of India

Media Reports

**The Perpetrators:**

Dr. Abhishek Pallava, SP, Dantewada

Dhirendra Patel SDOP, Kirandul Police station

Station House Officer (SHO) of Kirandul police station

**Date and Place of Incident:**

September 16, 2019

Kirandul police station of Dantewada district, Chhattisgarh

**Details of the Incident:**

According to the information received, the Chhattisgarh Police have registered an FIR on September 16, 2019 at Kirandul police station of Dantewada district against Soni Sori and Bela Bhatia, Nanda, sarpanch of Kirandul village and her husband, Bhima, and 150-200 unnamed villagers for protesting against an alleged fake encounter in the

region. The FIR registered under IPC Section 188 relates to disobeying instruction issued by a public servant. They have been booked for allegedly holding a protest illegally and shouting slogans against the administration and the police in Dantewada during the Model Code of Conduct. According to the FIR, Soni Sori and Bela Bhatia "instigated tribal" from remote villages to gherao a police station in Kirandul in violation of prohibitory orders under Section 144 CrPC, which are in place because of the by-election scheduled for September 23, 2019. According to the police, the protest obstructed operations of the police station, hence a FIR was registered.

It is pertinent to mention here that two alleged Maoists, Lachu Mandavi and one Podiya Sori were killed in the encounter on the intervening night of September 13 and 14, 2019, in a forest near Kutrem village in the Kirandul police station area in Dantewada district. Police claimed that both the Maoists were commanders of Malangir area committee of CPI (Maoist) carrying rewards of Rs five lakh each for information leading to their capture. According to the activists, the purpose of the FIR is to counter their support for villagers who have been suspicious of the circumstances under which the said encounter with alleged Maoists took place. Sources informed that Bela Bhatia first raised suspicions about the encounter and the death of the two on being fired upon by district reserve guards (DRG) personnel. The villagers also alleged that the two had in fact been murdered by the forces. On September 15, 2019, Soni Sori and Bela Bhatia visited the place where the alleged encounter took place. On September 16, 2019, about 150-200 villagers along with Bela Bhatia and Soni Sori, the sarpanch of the village and her husband, protested claiming that the encounter was fake and the killed were innocent villagers, not Maoists.

Sources informed that on the evening of September 16, 2019, the two women activists along with the mother of the villager who was in custody and another villager had submitted a complaint against the extra-judicial killing of Podiya Sori and Lachchu Mandavi and disappearance of Ajay Telam in Kirandul police station. Instead of filing a FIR based on their complaint, the Kirandul police lodged a FIR against the two women activists and others that very evening. They have been wrongly accused of instigating and mobilising the few hundred people who had come on their own volition to Kirandul police station for a peaceful protest against this injustice and to secure the release of Ajay Telam from illegal police custody. It is clearly a retributive action by the police which was intended to intimidate those speaking up for rights and against extra-judicial killings.

**Appeal:**

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

- Order an immediate, thorough, transparent, effective and impartial investigation into the above-mentioned incident of intimidation and harassment by filing a fabricated and false FIR against Soni Sori, Bela Bhatia, Nanda, the sarpanch of Kirandul village and her husband, Bhima, and the villagers at Kirandul, for protesting peacefully against the extra judicial killing of innocent tribal villagers by Chhattisgarh police in Kirandul police station of Dantewada district;
- Order an independent enquiry into the extra-judicial killing of Podiya Sori and Lachu Mandavi, who were young and respected leaders from village Gumiyapal in Dantewada and had been active in the popular movement against the iron-ore mining operations in Nandaraj mountain in Kirandul;
- Take necessary steps to ensure that the FIR filed against Soni Sori, Bela Bhatia, Nanda, the sarpanch of Kirandul village and her husband, Bhima, and the villagers is withdrawn and that they are not harassed or intimidated or falsely implicated in future and give this assurance to the NHRC of India in writing immediately and urgently; and,
- Recommend strict and immediate legal action on the perpetrators in this case, Chhattisgarh police, for filing a fabricated and false case in Kirandul police station of Dantewada district against Soni Sori, Bela Bhatia, Nanda, the sarpanch of Kirandul village and her husband, Bhima, and the villagers, and give this assurance to the NHRC of India in writing immediately and urgently.

Looking forward to your immediate action in this regard,

Yours sincerely,



**(Henri Tiphagne)**

National Working Secretary