



# HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS' ALERT - INDIA

NATIONAL SECRETARIAT

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Ref No: HRDA/East/OD/02/02/2020

February 04, 2020

To

**Mr. Debindra Kundra**

National Focal Point - Human Rights Defenders & Assistant 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 – Odisha – Brutal murder of Right to Information (RTI) activist and human rights defender Mr. Ranjan Kumar Das in Beruan village under Marshaghai block in Kendrapara district of Odisha on February 1, 2020 – 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 brutal murder of Right to Information (RTI) activist and human rights defender Mr. Ranjan Kumar Das. The body of the HRD was retrieved from a roadside crop field near Beruan village under Marshaghai block in Kendrapara district in Odisha on February 1, 2020. HRD Mr. Ranjan Kumar Das is suspected to have been killed for using Right to Information Act (RTI) to expose irregularities and corruption in the execution of government welfare schemes and raising his voice against illegal sand quarries and brick kiln owners in the district.

**About the Human Rights Defender:**

Mr. Ranjan Kumar Das is a Right to Information (RTI) activist based in Odisha. He was the Kendrapara district unit convener of Odisha Jana Suchana Adhikar Abhijan (OSAA) which is a state level platform of HRDs. He was associated with OSAA since 2012. He was known for filing multiple RTI applications in connection with several

irregularities in Kendrapara district. RTI inquiry filed by Ranjan Kumar Das in 2018 had exposed brazen violation of law by Odisha Tourism Development Corporation (OTDC) in building a tourist resort in Odisha's Bhitarkanika National Park's core area where no such construction is allowed. In 2019 he had exposed misappropriation of funds allotted under Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) to an NGO of the district in connivance with officials of Bhitarkanika National Park by not planting mangrove trees in the forest.

**Source of Information on the Incident:**

- The Coordinator of HRDA for the East of India
- Communication with OSAA and other HRDs in Odisha
- Media Reports

**The Perpetrators:**

Unknown assailants

**Date and Place of incident:**

1 February, 2020

Beruan village under Marshaghai block, Kendrapara district, Odisha

**Details of the Incident:**

According to sources on 1 February, 2020 morning the dead body of Mr. Ranjan Kumar Das was found just about 2 km from his home under mysterious circumstances on roadside near Sinikata area of Beruan village under Marshaghai block in Kendrapara district in Odisha with multiple injuries on the head and face. According to sources, the body of the HRD was spotted by locals early on morning and they informed the police immediately. His family members and friends suspect that he might have been murdered. Sources informed that Mr. Ranjan Kumar Das was regularly receiving death threats for seeking information including on the numerous brick kilns that had sprung up illegally. He informed about the threat to his life to the district police and even filed a complaint before the Patamundai police station, Kendrapara but it is alleged that the police did not take any immediate action. HRDA was informed that only last month his parents received death threats asking them to keep Mr. Ranjan Kumar Das activism under check. Recently, he had lodged a case before the Odisha Lokayukta alleging encroachment of 1,100 acres of government land by a resident of Mahakalpada for shrimp farming.

He also exposed irregularities in a recent mini-stadium project which was to be built by using manual labour under the NREGA scheme but instead of following those guidelines the contractor used JCB machines to do that work. Mr. Ranjan documented the irregularities and exposed the corrupt practices due to which the payments of the contractors were withheld. He had also filed RTI applications seeking information about the quality of dry food for babies in anganwadi centres as well as irregularities in government schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Rozgar Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awaas Yojana. Mr. Ranjan used to file petitions before the Vigilance department and Lokayukta urging them to conduct inquiry into matters of corruption in the district. RTI activists in Odisha suspect that Mr. Ranjan might have been killed as he had raised his voice against illegal sand quarries, brick kiln owners, a few NGOs and officials in the district and its nearby areas by obtaining information under the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

**Appeal:**

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

- Order an immediate, thorough, transparent, effective and impartial investigation into the above-mentioned incident of brutal murder of RTI activist and HRD Mr. Ranjan Kumar Das in Kendrapara district of Odisha;
- Ensure provision of reparation, compensation, apology to the family members of RTI activist and HRD Mr. Ranjan Kumar Das for the psychological sufferings they are undergoing and give this assurance to the NHRC of India in writing immediately and urgently;
- Guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of the family of Mr. Ranjan Kumar Das who face the risk of further attacks and intimidation from the perpetrators;
- Put an end to all acts of harassment and attacks against all RTI activists and human rights defenders in the State of Odisha to ensure that in all circumstances they carry out their activities as defenders of human rights without any hindrances;

- Ensure the right to seek information guaranteed by the RTI Act and the Article 21 of the Constitution of India which guarantees personal liberty;
- Conform in any circumstances with the provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 9, 1998, especially its Article 1 and 12.2;
- More generally, ensures in all circumstances the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and with international human rights instruments ratified by India is strictly adhered to in the state of Odisha.

Looking forward to your immediate action in this regard,

Yours sincerely,



**(Henri Tiphagne)**  
National Working Secretary