



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS' ALERT - INDIA

NATIONAL SECRETARIAT

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HRDA strongly condemns malicious FIR against Medha Patkar and others

Human Rights Defenders Alert - India (HRDA) strongly condemns the FIR against prominent woman human rights defender (WHRD) Medha Patkar and 11 other trustees of the Narmada Nav Nirman Abhiyan (NNNA) by the Madhya Pradesh Police.

Ms. Patkar is a well-known social activist and one of the advisers of the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM). She has worked tirelessly for decades to defend and uphold the freedom and constitutional rights of all Indians. She has led numerous people's struggles for social justice across the country, including the Narmada Bachao Aandolan (NBA). NNNA has been working for over two decades for rights and justice for *Adivasi* and rural communities, affected by displacement from the Narmada valley in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

An FIR (No. 503/2022) under Section 420 (cheating and dishonesty) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) has been registered at the Badwani Police Station in Madhya Pradesh on July 9, 2022, against Ms. Patkar and trustees of NNNA. The FIR was registered after a complaint from one Pritam Raj Badole, associated with the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the student wing of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). In his complaint, Mr. Badole has alleged misuse of funds, cheating, financial irregularities, and anti-national activities by Ms. Patkar and NNNA. In the past, there have been multiple attempts to target Ms. Patkar and NNNA on similar grounds.

The FIR against Ms. Patkar and NNNA trustees continues the worrying trend of harassment of some of the finest human rights defenders of India. In the recent years, provisions of the law have been grossly misused by the state agencies to target HRDs who are critical of the State and its actions and policies. Several prominent HRDs are languishing in jails across India, without trial, including in cases where they are charged under draconian anti-terror and national security legislations. We express our deep concerns over this malicious FIR against Ms. Patkar and NNNA trustees and believe that this is an attempt to intimidate and criminalise people's movement against displacement.

HRDA demands that the Madhya Pradesh Government takes urgent measures to withdraw this malicious FIR against Ms. Patkar and NNNA trustees and refrain from initiating any coercive actions against HRDs in this case. It is imperative that the Indian State respect all its obligations under national and international laws, including its commitments and pledges in the United Nations Human Rights Council, and refrain from criminalising human rights defenders for their legitimate work.

Yours Sincerely,

(Henri Tiphagne)

National Working Secretary