



March 31, 2022

To,
Mr. Indrajeet Kumar,
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 - Maharashtra: Journalist Rana Ayyub barred by immigration officials at the Mumbai Airport from traveling to attend an international conference of journalists.

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 regarding journalist Ms. Rana Ayyub being stopped at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA), Mumbai, on March 29, 2022, from boarding a flight to attend a conference on suppression of journalists.

Source of Information:

Communication from the HRDA West Regional Consultant
Information gathered from media

Date of Incident:

March 29, 2022

Place of Incident:

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport, Mumbai.

The Perpetrators:

Immigration officers of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport
Officials of Enforcement Directorate

About the Human Rights Defender:

Ms. Rana Ayyub is an Indian journalist, author, and columnist with The Washington Post. She has worked as an investigative journalist and is the author of the book 'The Gujarat Files'. Ms. Ayyub has received many awards for excellence in journalism.

Background of the Incident:

In September 2021, the UP police registered an FIR at the Indrapuram police station, Ghaziabad, on a complaint from Mr. Vikas Sankrityayan, the founder of an NGO called 'Hindu IT Cell' and a resident of Indrapuram. According to the allegations, Ms. Ayyub collected funds through Ketto, a crowdfunding platform, in the name of Covid relief work but diverted the funds. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) had initiated an investigation into the money laundering allegations levied against Ms. Ayyub.

Details of the Incident:

On March 29, 2022, Ms. Ayyub was scheduled to travel to the United Kingdom to deliver a lecture in London at the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) and then was scheduled to travel to Italy to deliver a keynote address on the suppression of journalists in India.

At around 12 noon, she was stopped by immigration officials on the basis of a lookout circular issued by the Enforcement Directorate. ED issued her a summon, delivered by email to her at 1.46 pm, one hour and 15 minutes before her scheduled 3 pm departure. This summons is for April 1, 2022.

HRDA believes that stopping Ms. Ayyub from attending international conferences on journalists is an act of reprisal against a human rights defender and journalist for being a vocal advocate of human rights. Ms. Ayyub's continued harassment must be seen in the light of consistent online and offline attacks on her being critical of the government and its policies and actions on minority rights.

Previously, the UN special rapporteurs on human rights defenders and freedom of opinion and expression have called the attacks on Ms. Ayyub to be *"relentless misogynistic and sectarian"*. The UN special rapporteurs also stated that *"for a number of years, the Indian authorities have been targeting Ms. Ayyub with various forms of harassment"*.

They also said that the Indian authorities have been targeting Ms. Ayyub with various forms of harassment. *"On 11 February, for the second time in six months, the journalist's bank account and other assets were frozen in response to seemingly baseless allegations of money laundering and tax fraud related to her crowd-funding campaigns to provide assistance to those affected by the pandemic."*

Ms. Ayyub's harassment is another link in the consistent pattern of harassing journalists in India for criticizing the government. Since last month several journalists in the states of UP, Uttarakhand and Chhattisgarh have been illegally arrested and/or tortured in custody for writing critical articles critical of the governments. It is concerning that increasingly journalists and human rights defenders are barred to travel abroad.

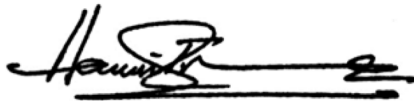
Appeal:

We request the Hon'ble Commission to urgently:

- Order an immediate, thorough, transparent, effective and impartial investigation into Ms. Rana Ayyub being denied her right to free movement at the Mumbai International Airport on basis of a look-out notice against her.

Looking forward to your immediate action in this regard.

Yours sincerely,



Henri Tiphagne
National Working Secretary