



Human Rights Defenders Alert- India

National Coordination Office

6, Vallabai Road, Chokkikulam, Madurai 625 002

Tamil Nadu, INDIA

Tel: +91-9994368540 Email: hrda.india@gmail.com

23rd January, 2016

To

Mr. Srinivasa Kammath

National Focal Point – Human Rights Defenders and Deputy Registrar

National Human Rights Commission

Manav Adhikar Bhawan

Block C, GPO Complex, INA

New Delhi 110023

Sub: HRD Alert - India – Urgent Appeal for Urgent Action – Attack and attempt to forcefully evict women human rights defender Ms. Bela Bhatia in Jagdalpur District in Bastar area of Chhattisgarh – Regarding

Dear Sir,

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 now writing to express our grave concern regarding continuous harassment, threats, attacks and attempts to forcefully evict Ms. Bela Bhatia.

Source of Information on the Incident:

The Coordinator of HRDA for the East of India

Communication with HRDs in Chhattisgarh and elsewhere

Media Reports

The Perpetrators:

A group of around 30 persons, several of them associated with State sponsored vigilante group AGNI

Mr. SRP Kalluri, IG Bastar Range and Chhattisgarh Police in Jagdalpur

The Human rights defender:

Ms. Bela Bhatia is a human rights defender, independent researcher and writer. Bela 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. She recently, on January 20-21, 2017, also assisted the NHRC team to record complaints of Adivasi women who have been subjected to rape and sexual violence by Chhattisgarh police in Bastar area.

Date of Incident:

January 23, 2017

Place of Incident:

Parpa Village, Jagdalpur, Chhattisgarh

Incident detail:

As per sources, Ms. Bela Bhatia was attacked by a group of 20-30 goons who came on motorcycles and jeep (White Bolero) on January 23, 2017 at 1:30 AM. Ms. Bhatia didn't open the door for her safety and was able to recognise one of the goons who frequently shared public spaces with IG Bastar Range Mr. SRP Kalluri.

The mob returned after a few hours and they surrounded the house, shouted abusive slogans, barged into Ms. Bhatia's house and threatened her that if she does not leave the house they will burn down the house. The mob also threatened Ms. Bhatia's landlady and told her to vacate her from the place immediately. In the meanwhile she managed to call the police and some people in the administration. The mob pressurised Ms. Bhatia to vacate immediately but she managed to get 24 hours. Ms. Bhatia and her landlady were also forced to sign a paper stating that Ms. Bhatia will vacate the house within 24 hours. Several members of the mob are associated with the State sponsored vigilante group – AGNI.

It is pertinent to note that earlier an attempt was made to forcefully evict Ms. Bhatia last year and a complaint was sent by HRDA – India to the Hon'ble Commission on 19 February 2016. This present attack on Ms. Bhatia is for assisting the NHRC team to record complaints of

Adivasi women who have been subjected to rape and sexual violence by Chhattisgarh police in Bastar area. This is also a reprisal faced by Ms. Bhatia for following up the cases of human rights violations by security forces in courts and commissions.

Appeal:

We, therefore urge you to immediately take necessary steps to -

- Ensure safety and security to Ms. Bela Bhatia and that she continues to reside in the house she is at present and continues to undertake her work as a HRD;
- Order an immediate, thorough, transparent, effective and impartial investigation into the above-mentioned incident of harassment;
- Take immediate actions against Chhattisgarh police for not taking actions against the mob who attacked Ms. Bela Bhatia and use all provisions of law to ensure that the defender is not harassed or attacked in future;
- Order the state government to reaffirm its commitment to protect the physical and psychological integrity and protection of all HRDs and specifically in this case of Ms. Bela Bhatia;
- Re-instate earlier directions of the Hon'ble Commission regarding summons to Mr. SRP Kalluri, IG Bastar Range, and take strict actions against Mr. SRP Kalluri given the vast volume of gross human rights violations and attacks on human rights defenders that are recorded from Bastar, Chhattisgarh.

Looking forward for your action,

Yours sincerely,

Sd/-

Henri Tiphagne

National Working Secretary

Justice (Retd.) H.L. Dattu,

Chairperson,

National Human Rights Commission,

New Delhi

Email: chairnhrc@nic.in

Front Line - The International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

Second Floor Grattan House

Temple Road , Blackrock

Co. Dublin

Ireland

Email : info@frontlinedefenders.org

WORLDWIDE MOVEMENT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

(FIDH)

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)

66/2, Pan Road, Silom Bang Rak,

Bangkok, 10500 Thailand.

Email: hrd@forum-asia.org