



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS' ALERT - INDIA

NATIONAL SECRETARIAT

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July 29, 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

Dear Sir,

Sub: HRD Alert - India - Urgent Appeal for Action – Rajasthan - Intimidation and threats issued to the local journalists and Human Rights Defenders by sand mafia in Mangrole sub division of Baran district of Rajasthan – 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 attempt to intimidate and threaten local journalists and human rights defenders by the sand mafia in Mangrole sub division of Baran district of Rajasthan during the news coverage on 5 July, 2019. The journalists were threatened when they were on the reporting assignment and taking photographs of a dumper truck got stuck at Ramgarh road in Mangrol area in Baran district, Rajasthan while carrying the sand allegedly quarried illegally from local Banas river.

About the Human Rights Defender:

Local journalists and human rights defenders who were threatened by the sand mafia are working in local newspapers reporting from Mangrole in Baran district of Rajasthan. They include Mr. Surendra Chaurasha of Hindi daily 'Dainik Bhaskar', Mr. Govind Rathore of Hindi newspaper 'Dainik Navjyoti', Mr. Om Prakash Sharma of 'Chambal Sandesh' and Mr. Kuldeep Singh Solanki of 'Bureau' newspaper.

Source of Information on the Incident:

- The Coordinator of HRDA for the North of India
- The Coordinator of HRDA for Rajasthan, India

The Perpetrators:

Two unknown accused (Unidentified)

Date and Place of incident:

5 July, 2019

Ramgarh Road, Mangrole, District Baran, Rajasthan

Details of the Incident:

According to sources on 5 July, 2019 journalists and human rights defenders from various local media organizations of Rajasthan received an information that a dumper truck is stuck on the Ramgarh road in Mangrole sub division of Baran district of Rajasthan and that the truck was hindering the movement of other vehicles on the road. These trucks are often used by the sand mafia in the region to carry sand extracted illegally. Local journalists including Mr. Surendra Chaurasha of Hindi daily Dainik Bhaskar, Mr. Surender Rathore of Dainik Navjyoti, Mr. Om Prakesh Sharma of Chambal Sandesh and Mr. Kuldeep Singh Solanki of Bureau newspaper reached the spot to report on the matter. At that time, the truck filled with sand was being offloaded. When the journalists started taking photographs for their news coverage, two persons (could not be identified) threatened the journalists who were taking pictures. They also said that their news coverage would not do any harm to them as they have political influence. Realizing the gravity of situation, all journalists had to stop their work and left the place fearing for their safety. Sources informed that the two accused belonged to one of the many groups of powerful sand mafias which have been operating in the Banas region of Rajasthan which falls in the border of state of Madhya Pradesh. They not only threaten local people but also target journalists to forcibly prevent them from doing their legitimate work of reporting news on issues of social and public concern. Journalists and human rights defenders informed the local police about the incident at Mangrole police station and asked them to file an FIR against the accused and take action. The accused could not be identified by the journalists.

It is brought to the notice of the Commission that attacks against journalist trying to carry news of social importance is on increase and it is high point that actions are required to curb this practice.

Globally, Journalists who are human rights defenders face major risks as a result of their work. Governments and other powerful actors, seeking to escape scrutiny and stifle dissent, often respond to critical reporting or activism with attempts to silence them. The protection of journalists and human rights defenders, and ending impunity for attacks against them, is a global priority for safeguarding freedom of expression. States are under an obligation to prevent, protect against, and prosecute attacks against journalists and human rights defenders. Creating a safe and enabling environment for their work necessitates legal reform, the creation of special protection mechanisms, and protocols to guide effective investigations and prosecutions where attacks occur. A free press and active civil society are

essential to ensure the public's right to know, so that governments and institutions can be held accountable.

The United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity supports member States in the implementation of proactive initiatives to address the prevailing culture of impunity. The safety of journalists and their role in promoting inclusive and sustainable societies has been recognized by the United Nations in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Goal 16 of the said agenda outlines the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development provide access to justice for all and build effective and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Appeal:

- Order an immediate, independent, thorough, transparent, effective and impartial investigation into the Incident of threats issued to the lives of above-mentioned journalists and human rights defenders in Rajasthan;
- Take immediate legal action against the unknown perpetrators as mentioned above and ensure that FIR is registered against them after their identification and arrest them for threatening the journalists and human rights defenders;
- Guarantees in all circumstances the physical integrity of the journalists and human rights defenders who still face the risk of further reprisals and using all provisions of law to ensure that the journalists and defenders are not harassed and intimidated in Rajasthan in future and give this assurance to the NHRC of India in writing immediately and urgently;
- Ensure provision of reparation and apology to the defenders for the physical and psychological sufferings they underwent because of the threats while performing their legitimate work and provide a re-assurance of not engaging in such acts against Journalists and HRDs;
- Put an end to all acts of harassment and attacks against all journalists, writers and human rights defenders in general in the state of Rajasthan to ensure that in all circumstances they carry out their activities as journalists, writers and defenders of human rights without any hindrances;
- 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 Rajasthan.

Looking forward to your immediate action in this regard,

Yours sincerely,



(Henri Tiphagne)

Honorary National Working Secretary