



# HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS' ALERT - INDIA

NATIONAL SECRETARIAT

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**HRDA/NHRC-SM/West/MH/22/02/2024**

February 12, 2024

To  
Justice (retd.) Mr. AK Mishra  
Chairperson,  
National Human Rights Commission,  
Manav Adhikar Bhawan,  
Block-C, GPO Complex, INA,  
New Delhi –110 023  
Email: [chairnhrc@nic.in](mailto:chairnhrc@nic.in)

Respected Justice Mishra,

***Subject: Requesting to initiate suo moto proceedings in the cancellation of lecture by Professor Ganesh Devy, chairman, People's Linguistic Survey of India, and a tribal activist, by IIT Mumbai***

We are writing to you to bring to your kind attention that on January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024, the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay cancelled a lecture to be delivered by Professor Ganesh Devy, chairman, People's Linguistic Survey of India, and a tribal activist without giving any reason.

Prof Ganesh Devy is the chairman of people's linguistic survey of India. He has written and edited close to 90 books in areas, including literary criticism, anthropology, education, linguistics and philosophy and was awarded the *Padma Shri* in 2014 as a recognition for his work with denotified and nomadic tribes and endangered languages. He was awarded the *Sahitya Akademi Award* in 1993 for his book titled *After Amnesia*.

He was to deliver a talk on the topic, "The Crisis Within: On Knowledge and Education in India" According to the abstract shared by the institute's email, the talk was about the challenges of educational institutions with aspects such as lack of infrastructure, adequate funding and genuine autonomy within educational institutions.

In an email sent out to the students, the authorities reasoned that the cancellation is owing to "unforeseen circumstances". The incident has been reported widely in the media and 2 links are shared here for your reference:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/iit-cancels-lecture-by-prof-devy-students-see-to-know-reason-9135813/>

<https://thewire.in/education/iit-bombay-cancels-lecture-on-crisis-in-indian-education-raising-concerns-over-academic-freedom>

We write to you today in a situation where freedom of expression is being severely restricted. Human rights defenders play a pivotal role in ensuring that protest and criticism are expressed in a peaceful and constructive manner.

Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution of India guarantees to all its citizens the right to freedom of speech and expression. Reasonable restrictions through law are permissible in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence India is also bound by international law covenants which guarantee the freedom of expression and opinion

We also wish to state that the state of compliance with the fundamental freedom of association, assembly, expression and opinion has greatly declined in the recent past. We wish to remind the NHRC that every NHRI has to be committed to implementing the Marrakech Declaration of the Global Alliance of NHRIs 2018 titled 'Expanding the civic space and promoting and protecting human rights defenders, with a specific focus on women: The role of national human rights institutions' and the Regional Action Plan on Human Rights defenders of the Asia Pacific Forum of NHRIs of March 2021.

We urge you therefore to exercise your statutory powers, including powers of Suo moto intervention, and vocally condemn the curtailment of freedom of expression of Prof Devy.

We hope and expect that the NHRC will intervene in this case impartially and in a time-bound manner.

Looking forward to your immediate action and response to us.

Yours Sincerely,



(Henri Tiphagne)

National Working Secretary