



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS' ALERT - INDIA

NATIONAL SECRETARIAT

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October 24, 2019

To

Mr.Khaleel Ahmed

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 – East Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh: Journalist and HRD Mr.K.Sathyanarayana attacked and hacked to death – 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 now writing to express our grave concern regarding the attack and hacking to death of HRD and Journalist Mr.K.Sathyanarayana.

Source of Information on the Incident:

- Media Reports
- RTI Activists in the region
- The Regional Coordinator of South of HRDA

The Human Rights Defender:

K Sathyanarayana, is a journalist with the Telugu daily newspaper Andhrajyothi. He was working on exposing corruption by politicians.

The Perpetrators:

- Mr. Dadiseti Ramalingeswara Rao, Legislator of YSR Congress,
- Unknown person aggrieved by the action of the HRD journalist

Date of Incident:

- Monday , October 14, 2019 around 7pm

Place of Incident:

- Tuni, East Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh.

Incident detail:

According to sources, on 14th October 2019, Mr K Sathyanarayana, a reporter with the Telugu newspaper Andhrajyothi was attacked by two assailants near his residence in S Annavaram village in Tuni mandal, while he was returning home from work. The incident occurred around 7 pm wherein two unknown persons who are believed to have come on a bike attacked Mr. Sathyanarayana with a heavy weapon and fled the scene, he died on the spot. The investigating officers based on the crime scene and the injury sustained by Mr. Sathyanarayana suspect that heavyweight iron rods may have been used in the attack.

The journalist's family alleges that this was a revenge killing, few other sources say that the murder may have been the result of a personal rivalry. He was apparently attacked previously also but the police had not taken any action. Based on a complaint by Sathyanarayana's brother, a murder case has been registered against YSR Congress legislator Dadiseti Ramalingeswara Rao. The district police officials are said to be looking into a past complaint filed by deceased journalist, as he had earlier claimed there was a threat to his life.

It is reported that, this was the fourth attack on a journalist in the state, in the past few months. On Aug 11, one Mr. Dolendra Prasad, editor of Zameen Rythu, a popular weekly Telugu magazine in Nellore was attacked with knives and sticks by YSR Congress party MLA Kotamreddy Sridhar Reddy and was arrested. On Sep 23, journalist Nagarjuna Reddy of Telugu daily Neti Surya was attacked with knives and sticks in Ongole district of Andhra Pradesh by unidentified Persons, suspected to be connected to former MLA Amanchi Krishna Mohan, an YSR Congress member. He was in a critical condition admitted to a hospital in Chirala. A reporter with Visalandhra, a mouthpiece of Communist Party of India was rushed to a hospital in a critical condition after a deadly attack in Srikakulam district in which attack, the hand of YSR Congress leaders is suspected.

Journalist unions, civil society organisations and opposition parties have linked the series of attacks on journalists to the alleged intolerance of dissent by Chief Minister Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy. Mr.G. Anjaneyulu, the General Secretary of the Andhra Pradesh Union of Journalists Federation (APUJF), accused the Jagan's government of having a "hostile attitude" towards the media. These allegations get credence from the

past statements that Mr.Jagan had made during his swearing-in on May 30, where-in he branded outlets such as Eenadu/ETV and Andhra Jyothy/ABN TV as “yellow media” (the colour of the opposition Telugu Desam Party). and he had said that his government will proceed against these newspapers and TV channels.

Immediately after assuming charge, the government was accused of coercing cable operators into suspending the telecast of ABN and TV5 news channels. A direction issued by the Telecom Dispute Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT) saying that the telecast of these channels should be restored allegedly went unheeded.

Further, the YSR Congress government, during its meeting on October 16, gave a free hand to the secretaries of government departments to initiate legal proceedings against media outlets which publish “baseless and defamatory” news. Such reportage, the government says, is done with an intention to bring down the morale of the government and hamper development.

Analysts and media organisations fear that the order could be used to stifle freedom of expression or go after journalists who are critical of the government. It is learnt that, the cabinet’s decision is a revision of a government order issued in February 2007, when Mr.Jagan’s father late Y.S. Rajasekhar Reddy was the chief minister of the undivided Andhra Pradesh state but was forced to keep the GO in cold storage following protests from the media and civil society.

Mr.Jaganmohan Reddy’s attitude is seen by many as a continuation of that same precedent where his party barred journalists representing the so-called “yellow media” from attending its programmes. Videos of him asking reporters of Eenadu and Andhra Jyothy to leave the venues of his media briefings after taking a cup of tea and snacks during his padayatra had gone viral on social media.

Mr.Jaganmohan Reddy himself runs a media empire – newspaper Sakshi and a TV channel with the same name – which acts as a mouthpiece. Eenadu, Andhra Jyothy and their TV channels are said to be backed by TDP’s N. Chandrababu Naidu.

HRDA is concerned deeply on the continuous attacks and killings of journalists which is directed towards the stifling of critical voices.

It is also pointed out to the Commission that despite numerous prevention, protection, monitoring and complaint mechanisms journalists continue to be targeted at an alarming rate. It seems nearly daily there are reports and attacks against a journalist somewhere

in the country. On this it is also brought to the notice of the Commission that in the backdrop of grave violations and abuses committed upon journalists even the Human Rights Council has issued a resolution on the safety of journalists. The resolution focuses on creating an enabling environment for media, and calls on political leaders to stop denigrating journalists and reinforces international criticism of political leaders who have sought to continue to undermine trust in journalists.

Appeal:

We therefore urge you to immediately take necessary steps to ensure that the Commissioner of Police, the Deputy Commissioner and District Magistrate of Godavari District:

- Order an immediate, thorough, transparent, effective and impartial investigation into the above-mentioned attack and killing whatever be the motive on the human rights defender and Journalist Mr.K.Sathyanarayana.
- To take immediate action on the perpetrators named in the FIR and other suspects and report within a short period of time to the Hon'ble Commission;
- Guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of the HRD journalist's family, friends and work colleagues without hampering their freedom to operate witnesses and journalist respectively;
- Specifically look into the complaint and charges made in the complaint filed by Mr.K.Sathyanarayana in the past and see what they actually reveal and on the inaction on the part of police ;
- Ensure provision of reparation, compensation, apology to the defender for the physical and psychological sufferings of Mr. K.Sathyanarayana's family, because of this assault and death and to provide a re-assurance of not engaging in such acts against HRDs such as Mr.K.Sathyanarayana. ;
- Put an end to all acts of harassment against all human rights defenders in the State of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana to ensure that in all circumstances they carry out their activities without any hindrances;
- Takes steps to conform to the provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 9, 1998, especially:

- Article 1, which states that “everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels
- Article 12.2, which provides that “the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration”;
- More generally, ensures in all circumstances the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and with international human rights instruments ratified by India;
- Recommend urgently and speedily during the pendency of this complaint the SHRC in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana to also take necessary steps to establish a state focal point for HRDs in order that HRDs in the have a new protection mechanism in their own state;
- Recommend urgently and speedily during the pendency of this complaint the SHRC in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana to convene a meetings of all state human rights institutions in the state [women, minorities, right to information, disability etc] to ensure that a coordinated strategy is developed within the State of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana for the protection of the rights of human rights defenders;
- Recommend urgently and speedily during the pendency of this complaint the State Government of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in collaboration with the NHRC Focal Point on HRDs and the SHRC Andhra Pradesh and Telangana to provide sensitization training to law enforcement and security forces on the role and activities of human rights defenders as a matter of priority, with technical advice and assistance from relevant United Nations entities, NGOs and other partners;

- Recommend urgently and speedily during the pendency of this complaint, the State Government of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in collaboration with the and the SHRC Goa to publicly acknowledge the importance and legitimacy of the work of human rights defenders, i.e. anyone who, “individually and in association with others, ... promote[s] and ... strive[s] for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels” (art.1 of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders).

Looking forward to your immediate action in this regard;

Yours sincerely,



Henri Tiphagne
Honorary National Working Secretary