



India: Attacks and death threats against four women involved in the defence of the rights of the rural workers and the right to information

URGENT APPEAL - THE OBSERVATORY

IND 005 / 0611 / OBS 095

Attacks / Death threats /

Harassment

India

June 27, 2011

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), requests your urgent intervention in the following situation in **India**.

Description of the situation:

The Observatory has been informed by the Centre for Organisation Research and Education (CORE) of the attacks and death threats against Ms. **Leila Bibi**, Ms. **Najida**, Ms. **Mumta Bibi** and Ms. **Iberei Begum**, four Muslim minority women involved in the defence of the rights of the rural workers and the right to information, in Yairipok Singa Mathak Leikai, Thoubal district, State of Manipur.

According to the information received, on June 19, 2011, while Ms. Najida was at the local market, two women pushed her into a house nearby, where she was severely beaten by the two women and by other unidentified people until she felt unconscious. Ms. Mumta Bibi came to help her, but she was also beaten on the head and fainted. The attackers left and the two injured women were then brought home by their relatives. They did not file a complaint at the police because they were threatened with reprisals by their assailants if they did so.

Moreover, on June 20, 2011 at 6.30 p.m., Ms. Leila Bibi's 15-year-old son was punched in the face by a resident of Yairipok Mathak Leikai as he was searching for a lost cow. The aggressor then followed the young boy as he was going back home. When they arrived to the boy's house, the aggressor tried to strangle the husband of Ms. Leila Bibi, father of the boy. The husband's brother came to see what was happening, and was struck on the forehead with a knife. After the man left, family members of Ms. Leila Bibi went to Yairipok police station to file a complaint. The police said they were going to take up necessary action, but as of issuing this Urgent Appeal, the perpetrator had not been arrested.

According to the same information, on June 20, 2011, Ms. Mumta Bibi's 13-year-old son was threatened by a local leader of the Panchayat of Wangkhem Kendra and two other men, as he was on his way back from school. The men told the boy that his family should not venture outside their house. On June 21, 2011, the same three men threatened the boy again, warning that they would kill him and his family if they kept on disobeying their orders. The family went to Yairipok police station to file a complaint, but, as of issuing this Urgent Appeal, no action had been taken.

These attacks and threats occurred after the four women filed applications, on April 25, 2011, to the State Public Information Officer (SPIO) of Thoubal district, requesting information regarding the rights of the rural workers under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)[1], as several workers had not received their passbook and adequate supply of rice[2]. As no complete information was provided by the SPIO, the four women turned to the Deputy Commissioner of Thoubal district and started to organise meetings every Sunday to exchange on the question of the right to information with other women of Yairipok Mathak Leikai, at the local community hall. On the night of May 8, 2011, after one of these meetings, an unidentified person reportedly kicked the front door of Ms. Iberei Begum and gunshots were heard close to her house. No one was hurt that night.

The Observatory recalls that on March 2, 2011, Mr. **Niyamat Ansari**, human rights activist engaged in the defence of workers' rights in Manika Block, State of Jharkhand, was killed in an attack which seemed to aim at sanctioning his work of monitoring and denouncing cases of corruption related to the implementation of MGNREGA[3]. Moreover, in April 2011, four Meitei women human rights defenders members of Macha Leima, an organisation dedicated to the empowerment and the defence of the rights of indigenous women, were threatened as they were trying to obtain information on the MGNREGA[4].

The Observatory is deeply concerned by the attacks and threats received by Ms. Leila Bibi, Ms. Najida, Ms. Mumta Bibi, Ms. Iberei Begum and their families, which seem to merely aim at sanctioning their human rights activities, in particular their attempts to seek information on the implementation of MGNREGA. The Observatory urges the authorities of India to guarantee in all circumstances their physical and psychological integrity.

Actions requested:

The Observatory urges the authorities of India to:

- i. Guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of Ms. Leila Bibi, Ms. Najida, Ms. Mumta Bibi, Ms. Iberei Begum, the members of their families as well as all human rights defenders in India;

- ii. Order an immediate, thorough, effective, transparent and impartial investigation into the attacks and death threats mentioned above, the result of which must be made public, in order to identify all those responsible, bring them before a civil competent and impartial tribunal and apply to them the penal sanctions provided by the law;

- iii. Put an end to acts of harassment and threats against Ms. Leila Bibi, Ms. Najida, Ms. Mumta Bibi and Ms. Iberei Begum as well as against all Indian human rights defenders;

- iv. Conform to the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 9, 1998, especially:
 - its 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";

 - its Article 6(a), which provides that "everyone has the right, individually and in associations with others, to know, seek, obtain, receive and hold information about all human rights and fundamental freedoms";

 - and its Article 12.2, which states 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".

- v. Ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments ratified by India.

Addresses:

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- Justice Kapadia, Chief Justice of India **and** RK. Raghavan, Chairman of the Special Investigation Team, **Supreme Court**, Tilak Marg, New Delhi -1, India. Fax: +91 11 233 83792, Email: supremecourt@nic.in
- Justice K. G. Balkrishnan, Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission of India, Faridkot House, Copernicus Marg, New Delhi 110 001, India. Tel: +91 11 230 74448, Fax: +91 11 2334 0016, Email: covdnhrc@nic.in ; ionhrc@nic.in ; chairnhrc@nic.in
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- Mr. Satyendra Mishra, Chief Information Commissioner, Central Information Commission, 306, 2nd Floor, August Kranti Bhavan, Bhikaji Cama Place, New Delhi-110 066 India. Email: s.mishra@nic.in
- Dr. L. Ibetombi, Chairperson, Manipur State Women Commission, DC Office Complex, North Block, Post Office LAMPHELPAT, Manipur-04, India. Email: mscw_imphal@yahoo.com
- Mr. RK. Angousana Singh, Chief Information Commission, Manipur Station Information commission, Room No. 58, Secretariat Building, Babupara Imphal 795001 Manipur, India. Fax: 0385-2456302
- Gopinathan, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Permanent Representative to the United Nations (Geneva), Rue du Valais 9, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland. Tel: +41 22 906 86 86, Fax: +41 22 906 86 96, Email: mission.india@ties.itu.int
- Embassy of India in Brussels, 217 Chaussée de Vleurgat, 1050 Brussels, Belgium, Fax: +32 (0)2 6489638 or +32 (0)2 6451869

Please also write to the diplomatic representations of India in your respective countries.

Geneva-Paris, June 27, 2011

Kindly inform us of any action undertaken quoting the code of this appeal in your reply.

The Observatory, an OMCT and FIDH venture, is dedicated to the protection of Human Rights Defenders and aims to offer them concrete support in their time of need.

To contact the Observatory, call the emergency line:

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[1] MGNREGA enacts an Indian job guarantee scheme which provides a legal guarantee for 100 days of employment in every financial year to adult members of any rural household willing to carry-out public work-related unskilled manual work at a minimum wage which varies according to the State. This act was introduced with the aim of improving the purchasing power of the rural people, primarily semi or un-skilled work to people living in rural India.

[2] The local Gram Panchayat is responsible for granting a "job card" to each applicant, which allows them to submit a written application for employment to the Gram Panchayat. The latter also has to provide the applicants with a passbook through which daily wages would be paid.

[3] See Urgent Appeal IND 003 / 0311 / OBS 044, issued on March 24, 2011.

[4] See Urgent Appeal IND 004 / 0411 / OBS 068, issued on April 21, 2011.

Attachments

-  Attacks and death threats against four women involved in the defence of the rights of the rural workers and the right to information
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