

To,  
Mr AN Upadhyay  
Director General of Police, Chhattisgarh  
Police Headquarters  
Naya Raipur, Chhattisgarh

11.3.2016

Subject - Repeated Harassment, Intimidation and Persecution of Ms SoniSori's relatives, including Mr. Ajay Markam and his wife, Ms. DhaniMarkam, by police officials of Bastar Range

Sir,

This is to bring to your notice serious incidents of intense harassment and intimidation of various relatives of our client, Ms. SoniSori, by different police officials within the Bastar Range. Most urgently, as of today evening, Ms. Soni's brother-in-law, Mr. Ajay Markam, has been held in police custody for a day and a half, with no intimation to his family about his whereabouts and the reasons for his detention. His wife and Ms. Sori's sister, Ms. DhaniMarkam, has also been picked up today by Bastar police and taken to an undisclosed location.

As you are aware, Ms. SoniSori was attacked with some corrosive chemical by three unidentified men on a motorcycle, while she was returning home around 10:30 pm on 20.2.2016. An SIT comprising of ASP Sukma Mr Santosh Singh, CSP Jagdalpur Ms DeepmalaKashyap and ASP Bijapur IK Elesela was set up to investigate this attack on Ms. Sori.

Instead of conducting a genuine inquiry into a serious matter, the police under Mr. Kalluri have turned this investigation into an excuse for harassment of Ms. Soni's relatives, as detailed below –

1. Mr. Ajay Markam s/o Mohan Markam, is Ms. Sori's brother-in-law and a close associate living in Geedam, Dantewada. He was taken in for questioning on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016, and extensively interrogated by ASP Sukma, Mr. Santosh Singh, in the presence of other SIT officials at PS Geedam, Dantewada. During this questioning, he was repeatedly told by the interrogating team that the police would arrest him for orchestrating the attack on Ms. Sori. He was asked to give his phone number to the investigators – a request with which he complied.

Later that evening, he received a call from an unknown number on his phone, where a caller whose voice Mr. Markam did not recognize, spoke to him in Halbi, insinuating that Mr. Markam had ordered the chemical attack on Ms. Sori. As a responsible citizen, Mr. Markam gave full information about this mischievous call to the Town Inspector of PS Geedam verbally on March 1<sup>st</sup> itself. The next day, he took a letter with detailed information about this call to PS Geedam, but was advised to give that information to Kuakonda PS, since he was within the jurisdiction of PS Kuakonda at the exact time when he had received this mysterious call on his phone. He complied with this request also, and submitted written information about this call to PS Kuakonda on March 3, 2016.

Then, on the 09.03.2016, Mr. Markam was picked up by TI of Kuakonda PS, Mr. Sharat Chandra and taken to the Kuakonda PS, kept there till late at night, and interrogated for the entire duration. Again, yesterday, on 10.03.2016, Mr. Markam, was picked up from his house in Geedam by the Mr. Sharat Chandra, TI of Kuakonda, and taken in for questioning in Jagdalpur. He has not been heard from since, and no information has been forthcoming to his family as to the reasons for his prolonged detention. Since this detention is well beyond the 24 hours limit, it is clearly illegal and violative of Mr. Markam's fundamental rights guaranteed under Article 22(2) of the Constitution, and Section 57 of the CrPC.

2. Today, concerned family members of Mr. Markam, including Mr. Mundra Ram Sori (Ms. Sori's father and the father-in-law of Mr Markam), and Mr Markam's mother Ms. PaliMarkam, and his sister JyotiSori went to speak with the IG of Bastar Range, Mr. SRP Kalluri, to express their concerns about the well-being of Mr. Markam and to seek information about his detention. However, Mr. Kalluri treated them with utter disrespect, spoke to them in vulgar, abusive language and openly threatened and intimidated the family members that he (Mr. Kalluri) will destroy all of Ms. Sori's family. He specifically mentioned that he will ensure that Mr. Markam will be not be released from police custody, and the rest of Ms. Sori's family will also be made to suffer for her indiscretions in questioning Mr. Kalluri. He specifically threatened Mr. Mundra Ram Sori that his daughter, our client, Ms. Soni will be killed and that his grandson, Mr LingaramKodopi will also be jailed. This type of grossly offensive and threatening behavior towards an old, invalid person, who is also an ex-sarpanch and a victim of Naxalite violence, and other women family members, by a senior police officer is utterly shocking and painful.

3. Ms. DhaniMarkam w/o Mr. Ajay Markam, is the sister of our client, Ms. SoniSori. She studies nursing in Adawal- Bodli, Bastar and resides in the nursing training institute's hostel. Bastar police visited her hostel yesterday and wanted to take Ms. DhaniMarkam away, but the warden of the institute did not allow them take Ms. Markam without proper warrants etc. A three-member police team again visited the hostel today and has reportedly taken away Ms. Markam from the hostel with them, without giving any information to the family or to the hostel authorities. It is a matter of serious concern to the family members that a young woman has been taken by the police to an undisclosed location and this is against all legal procedures of interrogation or detention.

We request you to take note of these illegal activities of the Bastar police purporting to fulfill their investigative role. This type of open harassment and intimidation of the family members of our client is causing intense emotional strain on her and making her fearful of her own safety and that of those close to her. It is clear that through such intense persecution of all those associated with our client, the police wish to silence her and pressure her into withdrawing the serious charges of atrocities that she has leveled against them – if that happens, it will indeed be a very severe blow to the democratic framework of our nation.

We request that you intervene at the earliest, restore Ms and Mr. Markam to their families, and stop further harassment of Ms. Soni's family members, in order to instill a sense of safety and security amongst the residents of Bastar division.

Sincerely,

Adv. Shalini Gera

Adv. IshaKhandelwal

Copies to –

1. Mr. DM Awasthi, Special DGP (Anti Naxal Operations), Chhattisgarh
  2. Ms. Chhaya Sharma, DIG; Mr. Sanjay Jain, Sr SP, Ms Sumedha Dwivedi, Sr SP, Investigation Division, National Human Rights Commission
  3. Mr. AK Parashar, Focal Point of Human Rights Defenders, NHRC
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