

Press Release

POLICE TERROR AND BRUTALITY IN SARGUJA DISTRICT

In Sarguja district of Chattisgarh State, (particularly, police district Balrampur), serious charges were levelled by the villagers against S. R.P. Kalluri Supdt. Of Police and his men. These charges range from rape, fake encounters, torture in police custody, indiscriminate searches, lathi charges, illegal detention, and terrorizing villagers. There have been numerous media reports on the growing police excesses.

Taking cognizance of this, a group of civil rights activists consisting of journalists, lawyers, academicians etc visited Sarguja district under the initiative of CAVOW and PUCL Chattisgarh from 27th to 29th of Jan. 2007. The team toured the affected areas and talked to people in Ambikapur town and villages and also collected documents.

There are many charges against S.R.P. Kalluri, S.P, including the latest one by Seema, a tribal woman, of gangrape by Kalluri and his men in police custody. She has also alleged that her husband Ramesh was killed in a fake encounter by the police when he went to surrender. Her complaint has been admitted by the Bilaspur High Court.

The fact finding team found many instances where the villagers opposed the police claims of encounter killings and said that these people were arrested, tortured in police custody and shot dead later in fake encounters. Thus, Narayan a Zonal Commander was picked up from Kotsari village where he had gone to attend a karma festival. He was picked up while sleeping from the house of a local villager and killed in a fake encounter the next morning. Most of the villagers in this village were too terrified to speak openly fearing police reprisal. In another instance, Sagar and Shoma were picked up when they were returning to their village and their death too was shown as an encounter to the media.

This process of extrajudicial killings is not limited to purported Naxalites but extends to innocent villagers. Thus five people were shot dead in Lakrakona village in a fake encounter and labeled as Naxalites. The post mortem report of one of the deceased Giriwar, made available to the team shows that the bullet entered from the top right hand shoulder and exited from the bottom left breast, a wound which would typically be inflicted on a person who is shot from above while he is in a kneeling-down position. The team has made a fairly comprehensive record of such cases and plans to release it in the next PUCL convention.

The extent of lawlessness within the police administration is reflected by the growing extra-official power of Brijesh Tiwari, Asstt Platoon Commander (S.I) who is notoriously known as the encounter specialist. A FIR has been lodged against him by a local contractor whose son was badly beaten up and threatened by him. A meeting organized by CPI in Belsota, Attouri village was disrupted by Tiwari and his goons by mercilessly beating up the assembled persons. This was accompanied by filthy abuses and physical threats to eliminate the leaders at gunpoint.

Even more blatant is the terror tactics employed by Dhiraj Jaiswal, a SPO who is not even a formal member of the police force but enjoys the patronage of Kalluri. He moves around with a group of persons heavily armed with AK47s and LMGs. He has physically threatened trade union

leaders and political activists of the CPI and even fired at them. It is alleged that he has close links with the coal and bauxite mining mafia which is active in the region. He has been seen moving about in vehicles owned by Hindalco. The colour advertisements carried by newspapers of the region with his photograph alongwith that of Kalluri SP reflects his growing extra constitutional influence.

The intolerance of the police towards all democratic processes has been manifest in a range of incidents such as the physical assault on members of the national level Rozgar Yatra led by Jean Dreze, an eminent economist. In a subsequent enquiry following this assault, the persons who went to depose were intimidated by SRP Kalluri to withdraw their complaints.

Even while investigating ordinary crimes, such as a recent case of rape and double murder which had lead to hue and cry in the Ambikapur town, the police appears to have gone to extraordinary lengths to implicate poor Adivasi tribals of the denotified Baadi tribe. There are reasons to believe that this was in order to protect some powerful culprit.

The police administration has thus become a law unto themselves terrorizing local people with the district administration abdicating its responsibility completely in the matter. Thus the system of checks and balances which is supposed to operate to check such excesses is conspicuous by its absence.

The fact finding team demands that a high powered committee consisting of judges and human rights activists be constituted to investigate into complaints of police atrocities and punish the guilty policemen. During any such investigation the accused police officers should remain under suspension so that witnesses may speak fearlessly.

The fact finding team includes Sudha Bharadwaj, Advocate High Court Bilaspur; K.J. Mukherjee, Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; C. Vanaja, Journalist & Film maker, Hyderabad; Geeta Charusivam, CAVOW, Chennai; Ajay T.G., Chhattisgarh PUCL; Anuradha, CAVOW; Anil Kumar, Media Researcher, Wardha.