

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 20/016/2008

18 July 2008

UA 206/08 Fear of torture and other ill-treatment

INDIA Duskar Barik (m), age 43]
 Mamata Barik (f), age 25] **campaigners for indigenous land rights**
 Jyanti Sethy (f), age 20]
 Ranjan Patnaik (m), age 30]

On 11 July, the four indigenous land rights activists left Keonjhar District and fled to another location in Orissa after they received information that Keonjhar police intended to question them about their alleged links with armed Maoist groups. The four activists fear they will also face torture and other ill-treatment in police custody.

All four activists work for the Keonjhar Integrated Rural Development and Training Institute (KIRDTI), which campaigns for the land rights of *adivasis* (indigenous people) in Harichandanpur, Keonjhar district, Orissa state. Police arrested four of their colleagues at the beginning of July, and severely beat one of them while in police custody. On 12 July local newspapers published a story that stated Keonjhar Police believed KIRDTI activities were linked with armed Maoists groups, a claim vehemently denied by KIRDTI staff and human rights organizations who work with them.

Local human rights activists assert that the claims against KIRDTI and its activists are baseless and are part of a pattern of official harassment of *adivasis* campaigning for land rights. Amnesty International fears that all four are at risk of torture and other ill-treatment if arrested.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There has been an increase in human rights abuses committed against human rights defenders who are defending the land rights of members of marginalized communities across the state of Orissa. Indigenous communities in Orissa have increasingly contested the state government's plans for developing the state's resources, in particular its rich iron deposits. According to those working with KIRDTI the state government has been keen to explore the mining potential of Keonjhar District since 1996. Over the last six years the government of Orissa has signed at least 45 memoranda of understanding to set up various industrial plants in the state.

Armed Maoist groups seeking land reform through violent means are also operating across Orissa. On 16 July a landmine blast triggered by Maoists resulted in the death of at least 17 police officers in Malkangiri district, Southern Orissa.

Human rights activists fear that these attacks by Maoists will lead to increased harassment of activists who are peacefully campaigning for land rights of the *adivasis*. Some state officials have attempted to harass and discredit community activists by filing criminal cases against them and accusing many of them of having links with armed Maoist groups.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- urging the Chief Minister of Orissa to initiate prompt impartial and independent inquiries into allegations of harassment of activists belonging to KIRDTI;
- calling on him to take strict action against individuals and state officials responsible for filing criminal cases maliciously against KIRDTI activists;
- urging the Chief Minister of Orissa to ensure that human rights defenders are able to carry out their activities without fear of harassment
- urging the Chief Minister of Orissa to initiate a prompt, impartial and independent inquiry into allegations of torture in police custody of KIRDTI activists who are now in judicial custody.

APPEALS TO:

Shri Naveen Patnaik
Chief Minister of Orissa
Office of the Chief Minister
Naveen Nivas
Aerodrome Road
P.O. Bhubaneshwar
Distt. Khurda, Pin - 751 001
Orissa, India

Salutation: Dear Chief Minister
Fax: +91 674 2535100
Email: cmo@ori.nic.in

COPIES TO:

Shivraj Patil
Minister of Home Affairs
Ministry of Home Affairs
North Block
Central Secretariat
New Delhi 110 001
India

Fax: +91 11 23093750
Email: svpatil@sansad.nic.in

and to diplomatic representatives of India accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 29 August 2008.