

PUCL

PEOPLE'S UNION FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES

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29th August, 2023

**A call to the people of India
for solidarity with agitating Adivasis to halt repression by Police and
Company
Sponsored Goons in South Odisha

***"Save Our Sacred Lands and Mountains!!
Stop Their Destruction in the Name of Development!"***

In the wake of World Indigenous Day on 9th August, when local Adivasi and Dali t communities of the mountainous, bauxite-rich region of South Odisha, particularly, parts of undivided Koraput and Kalahandi districts, were getting ready for the celebration to assert their rights over sacred land and mountains, the Odisha police have unleashed severe repression by resorting to mid-night raids, abductions, illegal detentions, physical assault and incarceration as part of the road clearing operation for companies to loot bauxite reserves. The repression has spread and continues till now.

- Charges of UAPA have been foisted on nine activists of Niyamgiri Suraksha Samiti, including its leaders Lada Sikaka, Drenju Krishika and Lingaraj Azad . Upendra Bagh, charged falsely under UAPA charges, is incarcerated after he went missing for four days. Krushna Sikaka, a young Dongria activist of NSS, is incarcerated in an old, fabricated FIR, alleging rape.
- Over 25 leading activists of the movement against mining of the Sijlimali Mountain in Kashipur and Thuamul Rampur blocks are in jail in three spates of arrests starting 13th to 20th August 2023.
- Adivasi leaders of Mali Parbat Suraksha Samiti were abducted on August 23rd evening near Semiliguda, Koraput. Later on, they were reportedly let off on 26th August

near Dantewada, Chhattisgarh from where they were rescued by their families.

Over the last couple of years, there has been a concerted effort at building unity and solidarity among the struggling people of Niyamgiri, Sijimali, Kutrumali, Majhingmali, Khandualmali, Kodingamali, Mali Parbat, Serubandh, Karnakonda Mali and Nageswari Mali. In this endeavour, the initiative, support and solidarity from Niyamgiri and Mali Parbat, especially, has been a source of inspiration and courage to many of these movements. There have been *parabs*, *padyatras*, protests and joint programmes demonstrating solidarity and forging unity among the people of these movements. The celebration of World Indigenous Day was part of this collective activity.

Sensing this as a big threat to corporate interest, the state began the current phase of repression in the entire area. Undeterred, hundreds of people participated in the Indigenous Peoples Day celebration in every region.

People of Kashipur showed the same courage and determination, when officials of Mythri Infrastructure and Mining India Private Ltd (a mine developing operator for Vedanta, Adani, Hindalco and other mining companies) tried to enter Sijimali area accompanied with police forces. Women and men physically resisted them. In retaliation, police began midnight raids that resulted in disappearances and arrests to break people's resistance. Many were abducted from *haats* (village markets) and roads; many others were either detained for days or sent to jail later. Approximately 25 people have been incarcerated in Rayagada sub-jail.

There are several FIRs that have named over a hundred people with the ubiquitous "others" that leaves scope for more arrests, as and when the police want to subdue the movement. Many youths have gone into hiding in the jungles to escape the police. One person from Aliguna jumped from the roof top of an Anganwadi centre and sustained spinal injury. He is being treated at MKCG, Berhampur. Many others have been injured and are unable to get treatment as they fear arrests if they go out of their villages.

Women of three villages registered their protest against the brutality of police and company goons and asked the District Collector of Rayagada: "*Who are the police really protecting here, the company or the people of Sijimali, Kutrumali, Majhingmali*"?

It is no mere coincidence that state repression has intensified with both the ruling parties at the state and the Centre – BJD and BJP – collaborating in accelerating the acquisition of bauxite reserves. Recently, the Forest Conservation Act 1980 was amended in a brazen and undemocratic manner so as to make room for mining on Dalit and Adivasi peoples' lands and mountains. Both the ruling establishments seek to stifle the voices of these movements by putting their leaders and active members behind bars at the time of the upcoming elections. Local people have been, time and again, appealing to the administrations through all democratic and

legal means available and demanding respect to the laws related to Scheduled Areas. Instead of initiating a dialogue with them, the state has resorted to widespread

repression and police violence to satisfy the unquenchable corporate greed of natural resources and capitalism's unbridled accumulation of profits.

It is high time that the common citizens of India recognise that the Adivasis of South Odisha are not only fighting to protect their lives and livelihoods by stopping the corporate encroachment upon their *dangars* and mountains, they are also protecting those ecosystems for all of us, the entire humanity and fighting for peace and against war, as aluminum is targeted most by the global arms and armaments industry.

It is against this background, that we appeal to all citizens of India to:

- *Extend solidarity with the peoples' resistance in South Odisha!*
- *Condemn the acts of police repression by the BJD-led state government!*
- *Demand cancellation of mining proposals and leases in Adivasi regions that violate*
- *peoples' free, prior and informed consent!*

- *Oppose ecological destruction and support the movement of Adivasi to protect their habitats and ecosystems.*
- *Condemn the deliberate action of the Odisha police and Government to divert attention from the anti-people and anti-environmental policies of the government favouring rapacious corporates, by dubbing the social movement of Adivasis and other movements who demand transparency and accountability from the government, as anti-national and being Maoist frontal organisations.*
- *Condemn and oppose the criminalisation of the movement of the Adivasis to protect their habitats and bio-systems, by the police and BJD led Odisha government.*

We appeal to all to make a phone call and / or send emails to the Chief Minister of Odisha to stop the repression now and release the prisoners immediately. : +91-0674-2390902, cmo@nic.in, cmo@nic.in

And Shri V. K. Pandian, IAS, Private Secretary to C.M, Odisha : +91-0674-2536762, 2322165 cmo@nic.in, [cmo ps@nic.in](mailto:cmo@nic.in)

29.08.2023

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