



On the recent crackdown on Indian rights defenders and activists

IBON International Statement

4 September 2018

We are in solidarity with all Indian social activists and rights defenders who have been subjected to a crackdown by state forces in the past weeks. Among those arrested on trumped-up charges were five activists – Sudha Bharadwaj, Varavara Rao, Vernon Gonzalves, Arun Ferriera and Gautam Navlakha – who have long stood by the struggles of marginalised sectors in Indian society.

Aside from these outright arrests, Jiten Yumnam of the Centre for Research and Advocacy (CRA)-Manipur, a member of the IBON International Foundation, was also threatened by arbitrary summons by local police late August 2018. According to CRA, this constitutes harassment against the rights defender; this is not the first instance of arbitrary summons against Jiten. He had also experienced torture under the same local state forces in 2009 after mobilising against extrajudicial and political killings in Manipur.

Such state-initiated crackdowns in India and elsewhere have targeted activists who have been working with marginalised sectors such as indigenous peoples, farmers and workers. Tagging multiple activists as “urban Naxals” in India maligns and silences groups that assert the need for people’s development and express concerns on states’ rights violations.

These cases of attacks on people’s political rights are against the United Nations Declaration on Rights Defenders, and pose obstacles in realising the right of peoples to participate in their own development. Peoples have the right to resist repression and the collective right to their political and economic paths.

We join movements, civil society and people’s organisations in India in the call to resist these government crackdowns. Similar to attacks on Philippine organisations through “terror-tagging,” such repressive moves limit the spaces for people’s movements – not only in voicing out critique of state abuses, but also the room for collective demands for rights.

From India to the Philippines, and the global South, we join movements’ demands to end the harassment, spurious charges, and other politically-motivated attacks on rights defenders and activists. Grassroots movements and civil society organisations must heighten the clamour for truly democratic societies where people’s rights defenders freely assert and protect people’s political, cultural, as well as economic rights. #

IBON International (www.iboninternational.org) engages in capacity development for people's rights and democracy around the world. It strengthens links between local campaigns and advocacies to international initiatives and brings development issues from the international arena in a way that peoples' organizations and social movements can engage with at country level.