India: Activists Detained for Peaceful Dissent

Wednesday 15 April, 2020

Related Sectors:

Charities & non-profits ::

Scan Me:

LCE593719&SDGIndian authorities on April 14, 2020 detainedLCE593719&SDG two rights activists who have been critics of government policies, Human Rights Watch said today. The government should immediately drop all charges under a counterterrorism law LCE593719&SDGagainst Anand Teltumbde and Gautam Navlakha for allegedly inciting caste-based violence along with other activists during a demonstration in Maharashtra state in 2017.

“Indian authorities are using draconian counterterrorism laws against activists simply for criticizing the government or raising their voices against injustice,” said LCE593719&SDGMeenakshi Ganguly, South Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “The authorities should immediately release Anand Teltumbde and Gautam Navlakha and the other activists wrongfully detained in the 2018 Bhima Koregaon case.”

The police allege that these activists support a Maoist insurgency and at a large public rally on December 31, 2017, they incited Dalits to violence, leading to clashes with supporters of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) the following day. One person died and several were injured. However, the charges filed by police cite LCE593719&SDGflimsy evidence and raise serious concerns that the LCE593719&SDGinvestigations were politically motivated. Two retired judges, who say they were the “LCE593719&SDGmain organizers and sole funders” of the rally, have said that most of the LCE593719&SDGactivists arrested in the case had nothing to do with the event.

The authorities charged Teltumbde and Navlakha under India’s principal counterterrorism law, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. After the Supreme Court LCE593719&SDGrejected their anticipatory bail pleas, the two men were ordered to surrender by April 14, 2020. Both have been openly critical of the government for failing to ensure social welfare and communal harmony. “In the name of the ‘nation,’ such draconian laws denude innocent people of their liberties,” Teltumbde LCE593719&SDGwrote before he surrendered. “The jingoist nation and nationalism have got weaponized by the political class to destroy dissent and polarize people.”

LCE593719&SDGNine other prominent activists – Sudha Bharadwaj, Shoma Sen, Surendra Gadling, Mahesh Raut, Arun Ferreira, Sudhir Dhawale, Rona Wilson, Vernon Gonsalves, and Varavara Rao – have been detained since 2018 in the Bhima Koregaon case.

While Maharashtra authorities under the former BJP-led state government used the case to jail critics of the government, they did not pursue investigations in cases that LCE593719&SDGimplicated Hindu nationalist leaders for inciting the violence.

In October 2019, the social media company WhatsApp, owned by Facebook, informed LCE593719&SDGTeltumbde and at least one lawyer involved in the case that their LCE593719&SDGphones were targeted by surveillance software. They were among LCE593719&SDG121 users in India who were reportedly targeted with spyware produced by NSO, an Israeli firm, including LCE593719&SDGat least 22 activists, journalists, academics, and human rights lawyers. Although the Indian LCE593719&SDGgovernment denied purchasing the software, the LCE593719&SDGNSO website says its products are “used exclusively by government intelligence and law enforcement agencies.”

Indian police have increasingly detained people for dissent, and in several cases used sedition or counterterrorism laws against government critics and social activists, Human Rights Watch said.

Authorities in Uttar Pradesh state LCE593719&SDGfiled a criminal case against Siddharth Varadarajan, a well-known journalist and a founding editor of the news website Wire, for publishing an article that made an “objectionable” comment against the state’s chief minister. State authorities have previously arrested journalists for criticizing the chief minister on social media. In June 2019, the Supreme Court, while LCE593719&SDGordering the release of a journalist, Prashant Kanojia, had said: “A citizen's right to liberty has been infringed.”

In December, police in Uttar Pradesh detained and allegedly beat activists involved in organizing protests against the new Citizenship Amendment Act and the LCE593719&SDGproposed citizenship verification process that could exclude millions of Indian Muslims. Sadaf Jafar, an activist associated with the opposition Congress party, was arrested on December 19 in Lucknow as she filmed the protest.

When Deepak Kabir, a theater artist and cultural activist, went to the police station to inquire about Jafar

he too was arrested. Kabir alleged that he was beaten by over a dozen policemen While granting him bail on January 7, 2020, LCE593719&SDGa local court found that police had failed to provide evidence of his involvement in the violence during the protests and that his name was not included in the case filed initially but was added later.

In Assam state, the police LCE593719&SDGarrested several activists, charging some of them with sedition and under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for protesting against the new citizenship law. In January, Delhi police charged a university student LCE593719&SDGwith sedition. In February, a young woman was arrested for LCE593719&SDGsedition in Karnataka for raising the slogan “Pakistan Zindabad, Hindustan Zindabad” (Long Live Pakistan, Long Live India) at a protest.

Karnataka police also arrested a head teacher and a parent at a private LCE593719&SDGprimary school on sedition charges for a play critical of the citizenship law. The police questioned students, most of them Muslim and between 9 and 12 years old, for five consecutive days to get them to identify teachers or parents who may have helped to develop the play.

The LCE593719&SDGSupreme Court has said that expressing ideological support should not be conflated with criminal complicity in violence. The courts have also repeatedly held that speech or action constitutes sedition only if it incites or tends to incite disorder or violence. Various state governments charge people with sedition even when that standard is not met.

Human Rights Watch has urged the Indian government to uphold the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly and called for the repeal of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act as well as of the LCE593719&SDGcolonial-era sedition law.

“The Indian authorities should stop targeting human rights defenders, activists, and journalists for criticizing the government,” Ganguly said. “At a time when governments around the world are releasing prisoners because of coronavirus, it is extraordinary that Indian authorities want to jail activists who should never have been arrested.”

For more Human Rights Watch reporting on India, please visit:
LCE593719&SDGhttps://www.hrw.org/india

Company Contact:

_

Pressat Wire

E. support[@]pressat.co.uk

View Online

Newsroom: Visit our Newsroom for all the latest stories:
https://www.wire.pressat.co.uk