

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVIST MADE TO SIGN FALSE WRITTEN STATEMENT

Human rights defender Pavitri Manjhi says that on 13 June 2018, a police officer visited her home in Benghari village, Chhattisgarh state and compelled her to sign a false written statement. Despite her filing official complaints about the ongoing threats, intimidation and harassment Pavitri Manjhi faces, police have not yet registered her case for investigation.

Pavitri Manjhi says she was visited at her home on 13 June 2018 by a police official who compelled her to sign a false written statement saying that she had not been threatened by company officials. Five days later, on 18 June, Pavitri Manjhi filed a second complaint to the regional Inspector General of Police regarding the harassment she has faced for her peaceful activism. The first complaint was filed on 17 April to the local Superintendent of Police.

On 22 June, a local administrator, who had earlier signed as a witness the sale deeds of allegedly fraudulent purchase of Adivasi lands, demanded the identity cards of residents of Benghari village. When Pavitri Manjhi asked him to provide a reason for demanding the documents, he responded with verbal abuse and threatened to have her beaten.

Pavitri Manjhi has been on the frontline of protesting against two private companies who allegedly defrauded indigenous Adivasis of their land when developing a thermal power plant from 2009 to 2011, and a biomass power plant in 2004 and 2007. Along with other activists, she set up the *Adivasi Dalit Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh* in 2017, a community group that supports individuals to file formal complaints in line with the provisions of India's Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act – a special law to protect Dalit and Adivasi rights that criminalizes the dispossession of Dalit and Adivasi land without their consent.

Despite scores of Adivasi villagers having filed complaints to the police alleging unlawful dispossession of their land in June 2017, the police continue to refuse to register First Information Reports, the first step of a criminal investigation.

Please write immediately in English or your own language, urging authorities to:

- Provide adequate security to Pavitri Manjhi and other Adivasi villagers from harassment and intimidation, in consultation with them;
- Investigate any complaints of harassment, threats and intimidation of Adivasi villagers, and bring those responsible to justice in fair trials;
- Investigate the complaints of unlawful dispossession of land, and bring those responsible to justice in fair trials.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 8 AUGUST 2018 TO:

Minister of Tribal Affairs

Shri Jual Oram
Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Shastri Bhavan,
New Delhi, India - 110001
Tel: +91 11 2338 8482
Fax: + 91 2307 0577
Email oram.jual@gmail.com
Salutation: Dear Minister

Director General of Police,

Shri AN Upadhyay
Police Headquarters, Raipur
Chhattisgarh, India - 492001
Tel: +91 771 222 1100
Fax: +91 771 221 1201
Email - ps.dgp-cg@gov.in
Salutation: Dear Sir

And copies to:

Focal Point for HRDs
Srinivasa Kammath
National Human Rights Commission
Block-C, GPO Complex, INA New Delhi,
India - 110023
Tel: +91 112 465 1330
Email: hrd-nhrc@nic.in /
covdnhrc@nic.in

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 74/18. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa20/8206/2018/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Pavitri Manjhi, the Adivasi Sarpanch (elected head) of the Benghari village council in Chhattisgarh, central India says she was visited by two men at her home on 3 April 2018 and told to “withdraw all the cases filed against the company”. Despite telling them she did not want to talk, the men continued to harass her saying that “nothing will happen with the complaints you filed, better to withdraw all your complaints” and “everyone who helped you file the complaints are outsiders and will not be able to save you and we will silence them”. Pavitri Manjhi says that the men left after an hour; however, they visited her house for the next two days, continuing to pressure her to withdraw the complaints.

Pavitri Manjhi says her own family, like other villagers, were coerced into selling their land to agents acting on behalf of the companies, and that their consent was neither free nor informed. Pavitri Manjhi has faced threats, intimidation and harassment by men she says were acting on behalf of the private thermal company since 2015.

For decades, India’s Adivasis have borne the brunt of development-induced displacement, including through state-run coal mines. A range of protective laws have not prevented indigenous communities in India from having their lands taken, their livelihoods destroyed, and their rights trampled on as a result of business activities. In Raigarh district, Chhattisgarh, Adivasi communities have fought for years against what they say is the illegal takeover of their lands – through coercion, fraud and misinformation – by two private companies.

After Pavitri Manjhi was elected as Sarpanch in 2012, she mobilized villagers to file formal complaints, alleging wrongful dispossession of Adivasi land against TRN Energy Private Limited, which operates a 600MW coal-fired thermal power plant in Raigarh, and Mahavir Energy Coal Beneficiation Limited, which operates a 12 MW biomass power plant in Benghari. For her activism, she faced threats, intimidation and harassment by local strongmen. She suspects that these men were acting on behalf of the companies. Pavitri Manjhi says she reported these threats to the police, who refused to register a criminal case.

Gram sabhas (village assemblies) in the affected villages passed resolutions in 2015 and 2016 stating that their lands had been purchased through fraud and coercion. In 2017, Pavitri Manjhi and other activists set up the Adivasi Dalit Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh, a community group, to use the provisions of India’s Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, which criminalizes the dispossession of Adivasi land without their consent. Using the provisions of the Act, on 14 June 2017, the group supported 98 Adivasi women and men from four villages in Raigarh – Khokhraaoma, Katangdih, Nawapara (Tenda) and Benghari – to file criminal complaints against middlemen they allege were acting on behalf of the companies, and government officials who registered sale deeds.

Name: Pavitri Manjhi

Gender: F

Further information UA 74/18 Index: ASA 20/8676/2018 Date: 28 June 2018