

Press Release

Tamil Nadu, India: Post card campaign and Cycle Rally launched to condemn the State sponsored killings of tribals in the state of Chhattisgarh

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Post card campaign and Cycle Rally launched to condemn the State sponsored killings of tribals in Chhattisgarh and to demand that Mr. Chidambaram stop the tribal atrocities immediately

25/1/2010, Chennai: Speaking out against the State-sponsored killings and rapes of adivasis of Dantewada district in Chhattisgarh, Campaign for Justice and Peace-Tamil Nadu launched a post-card campaign and cycle rally from Salem to the constituency of Home Minister P Chidambaram in Sivaganga. Human rights activist Prof Marx and feminist poet Kutti Revathi announced the launch of the campaign at Chennai.

The month-long cycle rally will start from Salem on the 26th of January and will cover a distance of 900 kms going through Namakkal, Karur, Dindigul, Madurai to Sivaganga and finally come full circle to Chennai via Pudokottai, Trichy, Perambalur, Cuddalore, Pondicherry, Villipuram, and Kanchipuram. Cycling through villages and small towns, the cyclists will inform Tamil people about the killings and rapes of innocent tribals in Dantewada District in southern Chhattisgarh.

Government-sponsored counter-insurgency 'operation green hunt' and armed militia operation 'salwa judum' has turned into a massive tribal genocide in Dantewada, Bijapur in Chhattisgarh and the neighbouring district of Malkangiri in Orissa. Squarely blaming the Home Minister, 50,000 to 1 lakh postcards demanding Mr Chidambaram to stop the 'tribal hunt' in the guise countering 'internal terror' will be sent from Tamil Nadu in Tamil and English.

Over the last two years, atleast 3, 00,000 people have been displaced from the 644 "liberated villages" because of Salwa Judum. Of these about 50,000 were forcibly taken to the camps on the highways where they face acute shortage of food, water and other basic amenities. Another 50,000 have fled to Andhra Pradesh. The remaining 2,50,000 who fled to the forests for fear of being killed have been deemed Maoists and are hunted down every day by the armed forces. More than 5000 civilians are said to have lost their lives. At least 50 girls and women have been raped and sexually abused, and many more cases have gone undocumented. Police has failed to register FIRs inspite of

numerous complaints. National Human Rights Commission, which had taken testimonies of the rape victims in June 2008, has remained silent and no action has been taken.

“State’s creation of unconstitutional forces like SPOs of Salwa judum and spending public money on such nefarious activities is highly depolorable,” said Prof Marx.

In January 2010, a local newspaper reported mass exodus of over 25,000 people from 18 villages in Konta block of Dantewada to the bordering villages of Andhra Pradesh due to massive combing operations by the ‘operation green hunt’ forces. Independent journalists have reported killings of 44 men, women, even children as young as 10 years old between August and October 2009.

A team of 25 human rights and social activists from across India, including five members from Tamil Nadu, were recently attacked by a salwa judum mob of 400 people supported by people in uniform when they went to attend the proposed public hearing of atrocities and killings in Dantewada. Uniformed and un-uniformed armed people in unnumbered vehicles followed the activists, creating a sense of terror and threat over the two days that they were in Dantewada. “Clearly the Chhattisgarh government did not want us to know the truth”, said Archana Seker, a 19 year old student and one of the members of the Tamil Nadu team which had recently visited Dantewada.

Likening the situation of adivasis in Dantewada to Tamil civilians in Sri Lanka, poet Kutti Revathi questioned Mr Chidambaram’s and the State’s ulterior motives behind ‘cleansing’ of adivasis from the mineral rich land of central India.

Despite the several decadedes long presence of Maoists in the region, the Central and Chattisgarh Government’s renewed actions ostensibly against the Maoists began in June 2005, a few days after Tata Steel signed an MoU for mining iron ore and locating a steel plant in the area. MoU’s worth \$13 billion have been signed by the Chhattisgarh Government in the region.

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