

23.07.2020

To,
Shri Nand Kumar Sai,
The Chairperson,
National Commission for Scheduled Tribes
New Delhi

Sub: Urgent Appeal for protection of Scheduled Tribe Koyas of Satyanarayanapuram from forcible eviction-forest and human rights violations in the crisis of COVID 19.

Respected Sir,

A tribal village, Satyanarayanapuram of Ganugupadu, in Chandrugonda mandal of Bhadradi Kothagudem district of Telangana has complained that they have been forcibly evicted from 200 acres of their agricultural land eligible for recognition of rights under the Forest Rights Act. The Koya tribe of this village, having 80 families were physically beaten up and injured in the last week of June 2020, while trying to protect their land from being bulldozed by the forest department for plantation of tree species under the state's Haritha Haaram programme.

The village is located in the Fifth Schedule area and has been for the past few years, submitting representations for recognition of their rights under the FRA Act. However, in the midst of this crisis of COVID 19, when the tribal farmers had already ploughed their land and sowed a variety of food crops, the forest department, without any consultation with the Gram Sabha, started forcibly digging trenches around their land and planted tree species in their 200 acres. It is shocking that vulnerable tribal communities who are poor marginal farmers were thrown out of their lands at a time when the COVID 19 restrictions made it impossible for them to even submit any grievances or seek an opportunity to be heard by the concerned authorities. They are now without any source of livelihood and food security. Dispossessing the tribals in this pandemic situation and making them landless through the use of force is a violation of their right to life and their constitutional rights under the PESA Act and the FRA. There was no consent taken from the Gram Sabha nor was there a verification of their representations or implementation of the earlier directives of the district officials for recognition of rights under FRA. Such acts of dispossession also constitute violation of Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989 (Section 3) which treat as atrocity any wrongful dispossession of members of STs from land and interference with their forest rights.

We, as concerned citizens, Adivasi representatives and civil society organisations condemn this brutal act of violence and displacement of the tribals of Satyanarayanapuram village during the time of COVID 19 crisis. We appeal to your office for your kind intervention in preventing further violence against the STs of this village and appeal to you for urgent action on the following:

1. An immediate enquiry into the forceful eviction of the STs from their lands under cultivation by the forest officials and stopping the use of police and other forms of violence against the STs of Satyanarayanapuram.
2. Proper enquiry and survey of the lands under cultivation by the STs and due processes of law to be immediately implemented for recognition of rights under the Forest Rights Act for individual and community forest rights.

3. Restore the rights over the lands back to the STs families who have been in occupation of the forest lands and stop the illegal plantation activities which is against the consent of the gram sabha.
4. Review of the Haritha Haaram programme and the use of CAMPA funds in Telangana which are intruding into the fundamental human rights of STs, their right to food and self-governance as per the PESA, the FRA and the free prior and informed consent of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to which India is a signatory.
5. Review of the approach and targets set under Haritha Haaram programme which is being implemented at the cost of displacing STs in large numbers, from their lands, leading to serious negative social impacts as well as poor ecosystem restoration. As strongly recommended by the Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Eco System Services of 2019 by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform (IPBES), “the large-scale deployment of intensive bioenergy plantations, including monocultures, replacing natural forests and subsistence farmlands, will likely have negative impacts on biodiversity and can threaten food and water security as well as local livelihoods, including by intensifying social conflict”.

Therefore, we request that the constitutional and socio-ecological rights of adivasis be protected, especially in these emergency times, when dispossession from farmlands for marginal farmers would lead to distress migration and vulnerability to infectious diseases.

We enclose a detailed note on the case of eviction related to Satyanarayanapuram village along with supporting documents and video evidence of the forceful eviction process.

Thanking you

Yours Sincerely



Shri Ashok Choudhary, Adivasi Samanvay Manch
Dr. Bhanumathi Kalluri, Dhaatri Trust, Hyderabad
Shri Venkat Reddy, MV Foundation, Hyderabad
Dr (Prof).Padmaja Shaw, Hyderabad
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Ms Mamta Kujur, Jashpur Jan Vikas Sansthan, Chattisgarh
Ms.Sadhana Meena, Adivasi Ekta Parishad, Rajasthan
Ms.Kirti Vartha, Adivasi Shramik Mahila Sanghatan, Palghar, Maharashtra
Ms.Indu Netam, Adivasi Jan Adhikar Manch
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Ms.Shivani Choudhary, Housing and Land Rights Network, New Delhi
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