



International Network for Economic, Social & Cultural Rights  
Red Internacional para los Derechos Económicos, Sociales y Culturales  
Réseau international pour les droits économiques, sociaux et culturels  
الشبكة العالمية للحقوق الاقتصادية و الاجتماعية و الثقافية

**TO:**

**Shri Naveen Patnaik, Chief Minister of Orissa**

**CC:**

**Shri Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India**

**Shri Shivraj Patil, Union Minister of Home Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs**

**Tilak Marg, Chief Justice of India, Supreme Court**

**Faridkot House, Copernicus Marg, Chairperson, National Human Rights Commission of India**

**Mr. T. Theethan, IAS, The Joint Secretary, National Commission for SC**

**United Nations Human Rights Committee**

**United Nations Special Rapporteur on adequate housing**

**United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to food**

**United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders**

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**RE: planned forced land acquisitions and repression of dissent in Jagatsinghpur**

ESCR-Net is the largest global network of organizations and activists devoted to achieving economic, social and environmental justice through human rights, consisting of 217 organizations and individuals from 66 countries.

We write to express our collective concern regarding reported plans by police forces to forcibly enter Govindpur village (Erasama block, Jagatsinghpur District) in order to acquire lands against the expressed opposition of local residents. According to information received, twenty police platoons are stationed in the area and the authorities of the state of Orissa have announced renewed plans to enter Govindpur village. Members of the police forces have reportedly undertaken to destroy betel vines, a local crop, and affected villagers and human rights defenders have expressed serious concerns that they will be subject to acts of violence and serious threats to their lives and livelihoods if the authorities proceed to enter the community.

The lands in-question have reportedly been identified for the development of a proposed integrated steel plant and captive power station in the district of Jagatsinghpur. Local residents have expressed overwhelming rejection of this plan, which will affect three gram panchayats of Gadkujang, Nuagaon and Dinkia, representing eleven villages comprised of some 4000 families and over 22,000 people who depend on these lands, forests and natural resources for their livelihoods. Villagers have expressed repeated concerns that the steel plant and power station will destroy rice paddies, fish-ponds, betel-vine cultivation and cause water-logging on agricultural lands. The project will also reportedly utilize excessive amounts of water from the Mahanadi River which residents fear will create water scarcity for the purposes of domestic use and irrigation in the farming areas around Cuttack city. These impacts will affect thousands of villagers living in the project area, over one-third of whom are tribal groups and other disadvantaged castes, as well as poor farmers and fisherfolk.

On behalf of our members, we recall that India is party to the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and has thus undertaken the obligation to guarantee the right to an adequate standard of living, the right food, health, water and adequate housing too all of its people. It has furthermore been established by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that “forced evictions are *prima facie* incompatible with the requirements of the Covenant.” According to its obligations under the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights the Government of India has the duty to respect the right of all people to freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources and to refrain from interference with the privacy, family or correspondence of its people. It also is obligated to guarantee the physical integrity of its people and to uphold the principle that “in no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence.”

We have also received reports that, rather than providing protection for vulnerable villagers, the authorities in Orissa have processed hundreds of criminal charges against residents who have mobilized to resist the land acquisition efforts and advocate for the human rights of those who stand to be affected by this project. The criminalization of legitimate dissent runs counter to internationally recognized human rights obligations, including the principles set out in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders which recognizes the right of each person to promote the realization of human rights and provide protection “of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of” their rights as human rights defenders.

Therefore, based on the facts above, we urgently call on the Chief Minister of the State of Orissa and the competent national authorities to:

- Refrain from proceeding with forcible land seizure which poses a serious risk of violence and gross human rights violations;
- Desist from all acts of intimidation and the filing of baseless charges against villagers resisting the above-mentioned land acquisitions;
- Guarantee protection for human rights defenders from acts of intimidation and baseless criminalization by third parties
- Respect and undertake to fulfill the rights of tribal minorities (including Dalits and other vulnerable groups) to their lands and natural resources, and
- Undertake to fully comply with India’s obligations to guarantee the right to liberty and security of person, right of peaceful assembly, the human rights to food, water, adequate housing and prohibitions against forced evictions as well as cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment for all its people.

Finally, we request that you keep us informed of measures taken.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Julieta Rossi', written over a circular stamp or seal.

Julieta Rossi  
Director