

PRESS RELEASE**Delegation of senior human rights leaders visits UN:
Calls on the Government of India to engage meaningfully on human rights**

New Delhi, 21 July 2010 – From 28 June to 2 July 2010, a nine-member delegation of human rights experts from India visited Geneva, Switzerland, to engage directly with the United Nations human rights system. This was the first ever collective visit of senior human rights leaders working on a diverse range of issues in India to the UN, carried out by the umbrella organisation – the Working Group on Human Rights in India and the UN (WGHR).

WGHR's week long visit to Geneva included individual meetings with fifteen UN Special Rapporteurs and independent experts; meeting with various divisions of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; meetings with secretaries of treaty bodies; a meeting with the Chair of the International Co-ordination Committee of National Human Rights Institutions; a meeting with the Indian Permanent Representative to the UN, Mr. Achamkulangare Gopinathan; and a meeting with international NGOs based in Geneva. WGHR also delivered an oral statement at a formal session for civil society stakeholders to interact with the UN Special Rapporteurs.

The meetings discussed the worsening human rights situation in India and the various factors contributing to the violation of human rights. In spite of the much-proclaimed economic growth, India is also home to some of the world's worst socio-economic indicators. Discrimination and violence based on caste, gender, religion, economic status, occupation, political affiliation, and ethnicity have become systemic. Dispossession, increased marginalisation and violence have further fuelled armed conflict, especially in the tribal areas, which are rich in natural resources, including mineral wealth. Torture, arbitrary detention, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and sexual violence, which have been chronic in armed conflict areas have also extended to non-conflict areas, affecting a large section of Indian society. India's national human rights institutions continue to function with little or no independence, no open process of appointment, and have been lacking in diversity since inception. While India can be proud of extensive rights-based jurisprudence and pro-poor legislation at the national level, there are serious problems in implementation. WGHR conveyed at the meetings in Geneva that there is a tragic disconnect between the high quality jurisprudence and pro-poor legislation that exists in India and the unwillingness with which the Government of India responds to international human rights mechanisms.

In spite of the gross and large-scale violation of human rights occurring across the country, the Government of India's engagement with the UN human rights system is dismal. This is demonstrated by the government's consistent refusal to accept Special Rapporteur country visit requests, delayed reporting to UN treaty bodies, lack of implementation of treaty bodies' Concluding Observations, the recommendations arising from the 2008 Universal Periodic Review, and recommendations of Special Rapporteurs. Even after decades of interaction with the UN human rights system, the Government is yet to design adequate institutional arrangements, including co-ordination of Line ministries with the MFA, to implement UN recommendations. A National Plan of Action on human rights has not been designed to date. Since the 1990s, more than twenty requests by ten Special Rapporteurs for a country visit to India have been left unanswered. Open invitations to UN Special Rapporteurs to conduct country visits have been made by 68 countries. India does not figure in this list.

WGHR hopes that this visit to Geneva by human rights leaders from India will lead to improved action and monitoring of India's human rights record by the entire UN human rights system, as well as more interaction from national NGOs with the UN system including its human rights mechanisms.

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Advisors | Mr. Anand Grover, Special Rapporteur on the right to health, UN Human Rights Council | Ms. Indira Jaising, Member, CEDAW Committee

WGHR hopes this visit and the willingness of dialogue expressed by India's Permanent Representative to the UN will lead to greater openness from the Government of India to discuss and engage with critical human rights concerns facing the country. WGHR will continue to pursue efforts with the Government of India for better engagement, communication, transparency, and compliance with the UN human rights system and national and international human rights law. WGHR will conduct follow-up meetings with the Foreign Secretary and other relevant government officials.

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The members of the delegation included Miloon Kothari (Convenor, WGHR), Henri Tiphagne (People's Watch), Suman (FIAN India), Shivani Chaudhry (HLRN), Babloo Loitongbam (Human Rights Alert), Babu Mathew, Vrinda Grover, Srivella Prasad (NCDHR), and J. Rajkumar (FORUM Asia and Pax Romana)

The Working Group on Human Rights in India and the UN – a national coalition of fourteen human rights organisations and independent experts – works towards the realisation of all civil, cultural, economic, political and social human rights in India and towards holding the Indian government accountable to its national and international human rights obligations. For information on WGHR, please visit: www.wghr.org