

## Civil rights organisation decries UAPA case against Arundhati Roy

OP. ARULN | DC  
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A Madurai-based civil rights organisation has condemned the recent registering of a case against acclaimed writer Arundhati Roy under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, Vinai Kumar Saxena, sanctioned the prosecution of famous author-activist Arundhati Roy and Sheikh Showkat Hussain, a former professor at the Central University of Kashmir, under Section 45 of

the UAPA in connection with a 2010 first information report (FIR). Arundhati Roy and Hussain are accused of “delivering provocative speeches in public”.

In a statement, Henry Tiphagne, the national secretary of Human Rights Defenders' Alert - India (HRDA - India), said the move has sparked widespread outrage and debate, with many human rights organisations and activists raising concerns about the erosion of freedom of expression in India.

Arundhati Roy has been vocal on various social and political issues, often challenging mainstream narratives and advocating for marginalised communities. Her speeches at a seminar in Kashmir 14 years ago have now become the basis for legal action under the UAPA, a law known for its stringent provisions and wide-ranging powers.

The UAPA has been criticised by human rights groups and legal experts for its potential misuse and chilling effect on free speech. Under this law, individuals can be detained without

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bail for extended periods, and their activities can be restricted based on vague definitions of ‘unlawful activities’ and ‘terrorist acts’.

The case against Arundhati Roy is seen as part of a broader trend where dissenting voices, journalists, activists and intellectuals critical of the government face harassment, legal intimidation and even violence. The situation has raised concerns both within India and internationally about the state of democracy and civil liberties in the country.

In a democracy, all citizens have the right to record their opinions and express them without fear. Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution guarantees

this fundamental right. No government has the right to take it away or suppress it. Freedom of expression is the foundation of a democracy and an inseparable part of it. It is only in a dictatorship that there is no place for freedom of thought and freedom of speech. It is only under a fascist regime that individual liberties are completely denied.

Henry Tiphagne said there is an urgency for protecting freedom of expression as a fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution. He emphasises that a vibrant democracy

requires space for dissenting opinions and robust debates on issues of public interest.

He said the case against Arundhati Roy has sparked calls for reforming laws like the UAPA to prevent their misuse and protect civil liberties. It has also reignited discussions about the role of writers, artists and activists in speaking truth to power and holding authorities accountable. He sought all like-minded people, organisation and political parties to unite to fight against such suppression of the freedom of expression.