



## HRDA moves NHRC against the arbitrary arrests of three environmental activists

**Madurai: June 21, 2018**

The Human Rights Defenders Alert-India (HRDA) has moved the National Human Rights Council (NHRC) on June 21, 2018 against the arbitrary arrests of Mr. Piyush Manush, Mr. Mansoor Ali Khan and Ms. M Valarmathi in Salem, Tamil Nadu. The alleged perpetrators are Mr. Mari, the Village Administrative Officer of Thimbipadi area and the police personnel of Omalur police station. As per the sources, Mr. Piyush, Mr. Mansoor and Ms. Valarmathi were arrested on July 17, 18 and 19 respectively. Mr. Piyush was picked up by Salem Police on the highway while Ms. Valarmathi was arrested on July 19 while she was visiting the villagers in Salem.

The local police have arrested the three HRDs under fabricated charges for "instigating enmity between groups" u/s 153, 183, 189 and 506 of IPC and Sec 7(1)(a) of Criminal Amendment Act in the FIR No. 347/2018 based on a complaint made by Mr. Mari. Mr. Mari had reported the matter on June 16, 2018.

All the aforementioned HRDs are members of several social movements regarding environmental protection. Mr. Mansoor Ali Khan also happens to be an actor. It will be pertinent to note Mr. Piyush was arrested on July 8, 2016 and was subjected to physical assault, ill-treatment and constant torture in Salem Central Prison due to his work for the environment. HRDA had earlier petitioned the NHRC on July 16, 2016, and July 23, 2016, regarding the arrest. NHRC had registered this case as 1557/22/31/2016. HRDs including the locals in Salem are protesting the proposed airport expansion and an eight-lane super highway which will likely destroy 2000 acres of fertile agricultural land and thickly forested slopes of the ecologically fragile hills. Ms. Valarmathi was also arrested twice in 2017. HRDA submitted a petition before the NHRC on July 21, 2017, which was numbered as 1681/22/31/2017. The series of arrests of such activists hint at the possible attack on HRDs after their initiatives and protests against environmental harm. This is also a clear attempt to deter other individuals or organisations to raise dissent and protect environment.

HRDA strongly condemns this act of state reprisal and attempts of the state to stifle voices of dissent. HRDA believes these HRDs are being targeted for their human rights work. HRDA also condemns the unjust suffering the HRDs are going through.

HRDA has requested the NHRC to exercise its powers and undertake an independent and impartial enquiry in this case. In its appeal, HRDA has sought immediate withdrawal of all charges against the HRDs and their subsequent unconditional release.

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