

An Open Letter to the Chief Minister of Odisha Over the Ongoing Police Repression in Dinkia

To,

Shri Naveen Pattnaik

Chief Minister of Odisha

Dear Shri Pattnaik,

We, the undersigned, are shocked and deeply concerned over the ongoing police repression on the peasants and betel growers of Dinkia, Gobindpur and Nuagaon villages of Jagatsinghpur district in Odisha who for seventeen years have used the most democratic means to resist the forceful acquisition of land for the POSCO project.

Instead of giving any space or recognition to their collective mandate on their rights to land and livelihood, they are once again being subject to the most brutal repression by the Odisha police, which is aiding the administration to demarcate the land for the use of Jindal Steel Works Ltd that is out to set up integrated steel plant, a captive power plant and a cement factory.

As reported to us by villagers from the area and as per recent media reports:

- On December 20, unable to find the Panchayat Samiti Member Debendra Swain in his house, the police picked up his paternal uncle Ayodhya Swain who is a patient of paralysis. The police also picked up Ayodhya Swain's daughter Lili Swain.
- There was a severe lathi charge on all those who gathered to oppose. Some of the injured include: Prakash Jena, Nath Samal and Bhramar Das.
- On December 14, the following people were woken up in the middle of the night in Mahal village and threatened by the police not to participate in any protest against JSW: Ananta Nayak, Dilip Behera, Bairagi Mallick, Nirbhaya Nayak and Ajay Rout.
- In the middle of the night of December 4, 2021, as the entire coastal area was warned by your government and its agencies to remain indoors for safety and protection in anticipation of the approach of Cyclone Jawaad, police force in vans and Boleros reached the house of Debendra Swain, the well-known community leader who has stood by the people of the area in opposing land acquisition for POSCO earlier and for JSW now.
- A few hundred people gathered to protest against the imminent arrest of Debendra Swain. The police were violent and those severely injured include Shanti Das, Tanu Das, Mathuri Das and Manas Bardhan.
- In the aftermath of this incident, the district administration deployed police at Patana, Triolochanpur and there is a virtual siege as villagers are not allowed to go outside without showing their Aadhar Cards. Their mobility is restricted not only from going to

the fields or to the betel vine plots that need tending daily, but they also cannot go to town or to any hospital in need.

- Surendra Rout from Trilochanpur has been reprimanded by the police for participating in protests.
- A complaint has been registered at the Odisha State Human Rights Commission on December 21, 2021 with regard to the above incidents as we demanded the withdrawal of police presence and police terror on the people of the Dhinkia Panchayat.
- On August 21, Tuna Baral and three others were arrested for stopping a company vehicle from entering the area.

They were only stopping the distribution of bags amongst the youth as you know too well Sir that all kinds of petty bribes and attractions are doled out to the poor of the villages whose land is needed for industrialization. Have they once been asked why they stopped the vehicle? Has any inquiry been done to check these vehicles from entering the area of people who are collectively conveying to the government since seventeen long years that they want to retain the land for the livelihood of their children and future generations?

- It is a shame that the administration is making full use of the pandemic and the cyclones, Cyclone Amphaan in 2020 and Cyclone Jawaad recently, to pave the way for JSW.

Is the government afraid to have an open dialogue with its own people who has elected it to power?

- Public hearings conducted in Gadakujanga (Nov 16), Nuagoan (Nov 17), and Dhinkia (Nov 21) and Gobindpur (Nov 26) had huge presence of police and those not in favor of the project were not able to express their opinion freely and openly.
- How can these hearings take place, Sir, when you know too well that the people of the Dhinkia Panchayat have been appealing for the implementation of the provisions of the FRA (2006) since several years?

Sir, you had once claimed about Odisha being on the path of peaceful industrialization. We urge you to put an end to the presence of police in the area. Even as we write this appeal to you Sir, the betel vine plots are being destroyed and people are terrorised by the heavy presence of several platoons of police.

We welcome your resolution made in the State Assembly to include non-violence in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution. But the actions of the government and administration is having a chilling effect on people's rights and the entire eco-system. Sir, any effort of the people of Odisha to democratically and peacefully express the Right to Dissent is being met with police high handedness and terror. Finally, the vulnerability of coastal people and environment resources is given no consideration. We firmly believe that the long coastline of Odisha with all its rivers, beaches, flora and fauna needs to be protected for the people and future generations.

We demand a review of the entire industrial policy of our state as well as that of the entry of JSW in the Dhinkia region of Erasama block of Jagatsinghpur district with you and your government at the earliest.

Signed by:

1. **Brajendra Kumar Mohanty**, Ganatantrik Adhikar Suraksha Sangathan, 2. **Srikant Mohanty**, Chaasi Mulya Sangha, 3. **Pramila Behera**, AIRWO, 4. **Prafulla Samantara**, Lok Shakti Abhiyan, 5. **Biswapriya Kanungo**, Advocate, 6. **Pramodini Pradhan**, PUCL-Odisha, 7. **Narendra Mohanty**, Campaign against Fabricated Cases, 8. **Prashant Paikrai**, Anti-Jindal and Anti-POSCO Movement, 9. **Suresh Panigrahi**, CPIM, 10. **Shankar Sahu**, AIKKS, 11. **Ashok Sahu**, CPI, 12. **Jayant Das**, CPI, 13. **Narayan Reddy**, CPI, 14. **Sujata Sahani**, Activist and Poet, 15. **Sankar Prasad Pani**, Advocate, 16. **Ranjana Padhi**, WSS, 17. **Bala Bhadra Mallik**, Banabasi Surakhya Parishad, 18. **Radhakanta Sethi** (AIPF), 19. **Mahendra Parida**, AICCTU, 20. **Jyoti Ranjan Mahapatra**, AIFB, 21. **Ashok Mishra**, SUCI (C), 22. **Swayam Prabha Nayak**, SUCI(C), 23. **Bijay Kumar Panda**, Advocate, 24. **Subhasini Panda**, Advocate, 25. **Hena Barik**, Basti Surakhya Manch, 26. **Seema Sethi**, Basti Leader, 27. **Deba Prasad Rai Mohapatra**, Lohia Academy, 28. **Samaptika Tripathi**, Basti Surakhya Manch, 29. **Sadhana Dash**, 30. **Sasmita Jena**, Campaign against Fabricated Cases, 31. **Sukanta Behera**, 32. **Bijoy Kumar**, Ekta Parishad, 33. **Banshidhar Parida**, AIPF, 34. **Madhusudan**, CPI (ML) Liberation, 35. **Manas Pattnaik**, RYS, 36. **Sudarshan Pradhan**, Samajwadi Party, 37. **Rakesh Kanungo**, CPI, 38. **Satish Mishra**, Editor, CHHAI, 39. **Pradip Sahu**, CSD, Odisha, 40. **Bhishma Pangji**, CSD, Malkangiri, 41. **Josiya Rait**, CSD, Gajapati, 42. **Puskar Subudhi**, Basti Surakhya Manch, 43. **Sricharan Behera**, CSD, Odisha