

India: FORUM-ASIA Director barred from entering the country; arbitrarily detained

(Bangkok, 22 December 2017) - The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) gravely condemns Indian Immigration authorities' decision to refuse entry to FORUM-ASIA Director Mukunda Raj Kattel in the country. He was denied entry by the Immigration Department at Tiruchirappalli International Airport, Tamil Nadu, India.

On 19 December 2017, Mukunda arrived at Tiruchirappalli International Airport at around 11.30 PM. A driver from People's Watch, a FORUM-ASIA member organization in Madurai, was at the airport to receive him. At around 2 AM, he informed Henri Tiphagne, the Executive Director of People's Watch, and FORUM-ASIA's former Chairperson, that Mukunda had not left the airport. Mr. Tiphagne contacted AirAsia, the airlines Mukunda flew with, and was told that the immigration officer had barred him from entering India and was held inside.

Mukunda was denied access to a lawyer and held for more than 18 hours. He could not contact his family and friends as no communication access was provided. No reasons were given despite Mukunda's repeated requests on why was he barred from entering India.

He was deported back to Bangkok, Thailand at around 10:30 PM on 20 December 2017.

As a Nepali citizen, Mukunda does not require a visa to travel to India. The Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the two countries enables Nepali and Indian citizens to move freely across the border without a passport or visa, live and work and even own property or conduct trade.

Throughout the day, Mr. Tiphagne and other colleagues from People's Watch tried to communicate with him and send a lawyer to meet him, but to no avail. The airport authorities did not allow such efforts.

Mukunda has been involved with several human rights initiatives for the last 20 years and is a prominent human rights advocate. He is one of the two Directors of FORUM-ASIA and is based at the secretariat in Bangkok, Thailand.

FORUM-ASIA calls on Indian authorities to explain under what circumstances was Mukunda Raj Kattel barred from entering the country.

'This incident cannot be seen in isolation,' says John Samuel, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA. 'It is yet another example of the hostility of the Indian authorities towards human rights defenders. As a party to international human rights regime, the Government of India must guarantee the freedoms of expression, movement, peaceful assembly and association of all human rights defenders in India in all circumstances,' stresses John Samuel.

About FORUM-ASIA:

FORUM-ASIA is a regional human rights group with 58 member organisations in 19 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expression, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratization.

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