

## India: Stop harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders and women human rights defenders fighting impunity in Manipur

(Bangkok/Kathmandu, 15 April 2018) – The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is deeply concerned over the increase in incidents of harassment, intimidation and threats against human rights defenders, particularly women human rights defenders in Manipur. FORUM-ASIA urges the State Government to take immediate action to ensure the safety and security of all human rights defenders in the State.

FORUM-ASIA is particularly concerned about the recent surge of incidents targeting human rights defenders in Manipur who are associated with the case posted with the Supreme Court for which there will be a hearing on 16 April 2018. The hearing is related to the public interest litigation<sup>1</sup> filed by the Extra-Judicial Execution Victim Families Association Manipur (EEVFAM) and Human Rights Alert (HRA), a member organisation of FORUM-ASIA, before the Supreme Court of India in 2012, seeking a probe into 1,528 cases of extrajudicial killings, often termed as ‘fake encounters,’ in Manipur committed between 1979 and 2012 by the Manipur Police and Indian Armed forces.

The Supreme Court has already passed several orders both for investigations and to ascertain accountability of the alleged perpetrators. In one of the orders, pronounced on 14 July 2017,<sup>2</sup> the Court constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) comprised of five Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) officers and ordered the registration of First Information Reports (FIR) in 81 cases, including 32 probed by a Commission of Enquiry, 32 investigated by judicial authorities, 11 in which compensation was awarded, and six probed by the commission headed by former Supreme Court judge Santosh Hegde.<sup>3</sup>

On 14 October 2017, Okram Nutankumar, another human rights defender, lawyer and an active participant in EEVFAM’s activities, was fired at from outside his house. The following day, he filed a police complaint, but later discovered that the police had not registered an FIR.

On 2 January 2018, the Centre for Social Development (CSD), a vocal supporter of EEVFAM, had its foreign funding license suspended for allegedly working against the ‘public interest.’

While on 8 February 2018, Manoj Thockchom of the EEVFAM was detained by the police for 15 hours, without an arrest warrant, and interrogated about supposed links with armed insurgent groups.<sup>4</sup>

Women human rights defenders associated with EEVFAM have particularly been singled out by security personnel. On 27 February 2018, Ranjeeta Sadokpam, a researcher with HRA was harassed and intimidated at around 1 am by a group of police and army personnel. They came to her house, cordoned

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<sup>1</sup> Writ Petition (Criminal) NO.129 of 2012 together with Writ Petition (Civil) NO. 445 OF 2012

<sup>2</sup> <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/51378140/>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/extra-judicial-killing-in-manipur-sc-asks-sit-to-expedite-probe-118031201158\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/extra-judicial-killing-in-manipur-sc-asks-sit-to-expedite-probe-118031201158_1.html)

<sup>4</sup> <https://amnesty.org.in/news-update/manipur-human-rights-defenders-intimidated-challenging-rights-abuses-security-forces/>

it, and attempted to conduct a house search, supposedly to locate an individual named Somendro, who is accused of having links with a militant organisation. Despite Ranjeeta's full cooperation, including providing full information about the family members present in the house, security personnel cornered Ranjeeta's brother and took him outside the house to later confirm that he was not Somendro. Ranjeeta and her family members were forced to sign a document, the content of which was not made clear to them.

Later on 7 April 2018, Salima Memcha, a District Coordinator of EEVFAM was threatened, abused, intimidated and harassed by the Manipur Police Commandos. Commandos entered her house in the early morning at around 5 am and destroyed her property and belongings. Memcha is the widow of Md. Fajiruddin, who was allegedly killed in a fake encounter by Assam Rifles in January 2010. The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Government of Manipur is still investigating the case. On the 7 April, Salima was supposed to visit the CID-Crime Branch in the morning and submit documents. However, she was unable to do so, because of the search and destruction of her property by the Manipur Police commandos. The police team allegedly entered each and every room of her house under the pretext of a search, and threatened, abused and intimidated her for about half an hour.<sup>5</sup>

These incidents highlight a pattern of harassment and intimidation of women human rights defenders, and their families, who have challenged the culture of impunity enjoyed by the security forces over a protracted period of time by the Manipur Police and the Army.

FORUM-ASIA strongly and unequivocally condemns this harassment and intimidation. It is a clear sign of reprisals aimed at disrupting the ongoing litigation process, including the Supreme Court-directed CBI enquiry and National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) investigations. FORUM-ASIA calls upon the Indian authorities to put an end to all acts of intimidation, and protect all human rights defenders associated with this case by undertaking an impartial and thorough investigation of these events and their nature.

#### **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 democratisation.*

#### **For further information, please contact:**

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ifp.co.in/page/items/48139/rights-activist-threatened-by-police-commandos-seeks-dgps-intervention/>