

India: FORUM-ASIA condemns the brutal attack on women human rights defenders Agnes Kharshiing and her associate

(Bangkok/Kathmandu, 9 November, 2018): The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) expresses serious concern over brutal attack on the well-known Right to Information and anti-corruption activist and the president of Civil Society Women's Organization (CSWO) Agnes Kharshiing and her associate Amita Sangma on 8 November 2018. They were on a field visit to take stoke of illegal coal mining and transportation in Tuber Shohshrieh, East Jaintia Hills district of Meghalaya, when they were attacked.

According to media reports, they were attacked by a group of 30-40 people, consisting of coal traders and truck drivers. They were brutally assaulted with stones and sticks and left inside the jungle¹. Agnes' driver reported the incident to police in Jowai. Police then rescued Agnes, who was unconscious and was bleeding profusely from the head.

Agnes has been undergoing treatment at a hospital in Shillong and is reportedly in a critical condition due to severe head and lung injury. Her associate Amita Sangama is said to be stable. Agnes has been raising her voice against corruption and rampant coal smuggling in Jaintia Hills for the last few years and reported several instances of illegal transportation of coal to the authorities. She has also been facing judicial harassment for reporting other corruption cases.

Acting on the orders of the National Green Tribunal (NGT)² issued in April 2014, the Government of Meghalaya suspended rat-hole mining and transportation of coal in the entire state. The State government is yet to finalise a policy for scientific and regulated mining in the state. However, illegal mining and transportation of coal continues.

This is not the first attack on activists in the state vocal against illegal coal mining. Earlier in March 2018³, Poipynhun Majaw, another Right to Information and environmental activist was found dead near Rymbai road of East Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya with several wounds to his head. Majaw, 38-years old, was instrumental in exposing illegal mining in Jaintia Hills, a region famous for coal mining.

FORUM-ASIA strongly condemns the attack on women human rights defenders (WHRDs) in Meghalaya and demands immediate, full and impartial investigation into the cases and prosecution of the attackers. Government of Meghalaya must ensure full medical rehabilitation of the WHRDs. FORUM-ASIA further calls upon Indian authorities to put an end to all acts of harassment and intimidation against human rights defenders (HRDs), and ensure their protection by adopting concrete policies in the light of the 20th anniversary of the UN Declaration on HRDs.

¹ <http://www.theshillongtimes.com/2018/11/08/agnes-assaulted-in-ejh-for-probing-illegal-coal-mining/>

² <http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/content/390746/order-of-the-national-green-tribunal-regarding-rat-hole-coal-mining-in-jaintia-hills-meghalaya-17042014/>

³ <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=26031>

About FORUM-ASIA:

FORUM-ASIA is a regional human rights group with 67 member organisations in 21 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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