

For Immediate Release

India: Amnesty International Forced to Halt Work Government Increasingly Targeting Rights Groups

(New York, September 30, 2020) – Amnesty International India [announced](#) that it is halting its work in the country after the [Indian](#) government froze its bank accounts in an act of reprisal for the organization’s human rights work. Fifteen international human rights organizations condemned the Indian government’s actions against Amnesty India and pledged to continue support for local human rights defenders and organizations against the recent crackdown.

The Indian government’s actions against Amnesty India are part of increasingly repressive tactics to shut down critical voices and groups working to promote, protect, and uphold fundamental rights, said the Association for Progressive Communications, Global Indian Progressive Alliance, International Commission of Jurists, CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, Front Line Defenders, FORUM-ASIA, Foundation the London Story, Hindus for Human Rights, Human Rights Watch, International Service for Human Rights, Minority Rights Group, Odhikar, South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR), International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders.

The Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government has accused Amnesty India of violating laws on foreign funding, a charge the group says is politically motivated and constitutes [evidence](#) “that the overbroad legal framework is maliciously activated when human rights defenders and groups challenge the government’s grave inactions and excesses.”

The BJP government has increasingly cracked down on civil society, harassing and bringing [politically motivated cases](#) against human rights defenders, academics, student activists, journalists, and others critical of the government under sedition, terrorism, and other repressive laws.

These actions increasingly mimic that of authoritarian regimes, which do not tolerate any criticism and shamelessly target those who dare to speak out. With growing criticism of the government’s discriminatory policies and attacks on the rule of law, the authorities seem more interested in shooting the messenger than addressing the grievances. Women’s rights activists and indigenous and minority human rights defenders have been especially vulnerable. The recent action against Amnesty India highlights the stepped-up pressure and violence felt by local defenders on the ground, regardless of their profile.

The authorities have repeatedly used foreign funding regulations under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), a law broadly condemned [for violating international human rights law](#) and standards, [to target outspoken groups](#).

United Nations experts on human rights defenders, on freedom of expression, and on freedom of association have urged the government to [repeal the law](#), saying it is “being used more and more to silence organisations involved in advocating civil, political, economic, social, environmental or cultural priorities, which may differ from those backed by the Government.”

Yet, the Indian parliament amended the FCRA this month, adding further onerous governmental oversight, additional regulations and certification processes, and operational requirements that would [adversely affect civil society groups](#) and effectively restrict access to foreign funding for small nongovernmental organizations.

A robust, independent, and vocal civil society is indispensable in any democracy to ensure a check on government and to hold it accountable, pushing it to do better. Instead of treating human rights groups as its enemies, the government should work with them to protect the rights of all people and ensure accountability at all levels of government.

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<https://www.hrw.org/asia/india>

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