



# Forest Peoples Programme

1c Fosseway Business Centre, Stratford Road, Moreton-in-Marsh GL56 9NQ, UK  
tel: +44 (0)1608 652893 fax: +44 (0)1608 652878 info@forestpeoples.org www.forestpeoples.org

Shri Buddadev Bhattacharya  
Chief Minister of West Bengal  
cm@wb.gov.in  
Tel: +91 33 22215555  
Fax: +91 33 22215480

April 30th , 2010

Dear Chief Minister

## **Harassment and persecution of adivasis and forest dwellers in North Bengal**

*Forest Peoples Programme (FPP)* is writing to you to express its deep concern after receiving reports that police in Kurmai forest village, Chilapata, raided the house of Sundar Singh Rava at 3am on 8th April, 2010, attempted to arrest him without giving reason and forcibly dragged him out of his home. A case has been filed against Sundar Singh Rava and his father Manindra Rava (104/10 dtd 8/4/10: 143/186/353/506).

Sundar Singh, a first year student of Alipurduar College who has no criminal records, is the co-convener of the National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW), North Bengal Regional Committee, an organisation that has been fundamental in conserving the forests of Chilapata, adjoining the famous Jadapara Wildlife Sanctuary, through initiatives to implement the historic Forest Rights Act (2006), mobilizing people to conserve forests, institution-building at community level for forest governance, and stopping acts harmful to forests.

According to the information available to us at this time, the IC and officers from Alipurduar PS entered Sundar's house again on 24th April, 2010 and threatened villagers with 'CRPF action' unless Sundar surrendered. On 25th April, 2010 it is believed that the SDPO Alipurduar told the Convener of the NFFPFW North Bengal Regional Committee that it was a 'prestige matter' for the police and they would ensure that Sundar Singh Rava stays imprisoned for at least three to four years.

We have been made aware that police, forest officials and other authorities are persecuting adivasis and forest dwellers in North Bengal without just reason, creating false and baseless criminal cases against good, upright and socially conscious citizens who contribute vastly to the benefit of their community and

environment. The democratic aspirations of these forest dwellers seem to be deliberately thwarted by police use of power and authority without proper consideration and respect for the forest dwellers' human rights. The insensitive and antagonistic actions of the police can only have adverse impacts and lead to prolonged confrontations, social disruption and damage to forests, and threaten the cultural integrity of adivasis and forest dwellers in North Bengal's forest areas.

We urge your authorities to take urgent measures to conduct a proper investigation into the arrest of Sundar Singh Rava and the case against him and his father Manindra Rava. We also urge your authorities to enter into good faith dialogue with the representatives of the forest dwellers in the Chilapata forest region in order to peacefully resolve their grievances regarding recent threats to their rights.

Mr. Chief Minister, we call on you personally to take immediate steps to ensure that the aforementioned case against Sundar Singh Rava and Manindra Rava is annulled. Such cancellation will demonstrate the commitment of your authorities to implement the Forest Rights Act (2006) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) as well as other relevant national and international obligations.

We look forward to learning of your positive response to the issues we have raised in this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Annabelle Galt