

Shri Manmohan Singh  
Honourable Prime Minister of India  
South Block, Raisina Hill  
New Delhi – 110 001

11 February 2013

Respected Prime Minister,

We, the undersigned, are deeply anguished over the recent attacks on the people of Gobindpur and Nuagaon villages of Jagatsinghpur District in Odisha who have been using the most democratic means to resist the forceful acquisition of their lands for the POSCO project.

We are shocked to learn of the manner in which Government of Odisha officials along with over 12 police platoons entered the villages around 4 am on Sunday 3 February 2013 and indiscriminately hit women and children with *lathis* (sticks), cut trees and destroyed several betel vines. In the operation from 3 – 6 February, 50 betel vines have been destroyed. Reports indicate that more than 50 persons have been injured, of them three women and one old man severely. The police also arbitrarily arrested and detained several men and women who tried to resist the action, including one of the leaders of the people's movement.

Despite the temporary cessation of land acquisition, there is still heavy presence of police in the area, as the state government and POSCO have announced their determination to complete the process of land acquisition. More than 4,000 villagers, deeply anxious and fearful of further violence, continue to silently and peacefully demonstrate against the POSCO project and related state action.

The use of indiscriminate force against women, children, men, and older persons by the police is highly condemnable. The state government claims that people are willingly giving up their lands for the POSCO project. If this were the case, it would not be necessary to send in over 12 platoons of police in the middle of the night and resort to *lathi* charge and violence. To be attacked at this hour and be caught unawares despite countless organised attempts on part of the affected villagers and *POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti (PPSS)* to appeal to the government, shows the deep failure on the part of the state machinery to engage in democratic means with the people whose land it seeks to acquire.

This violent act by the state government appears to be a result of the announcement on 28 January 2013 of the Commerce Minister (Mr Anand Sharma) that the Government of India will review delays in POSCO's USD 12 billion plant in Odisha, as it is committed to ensuring "smooth take off" of the project –supposedly the highest foreign direct investment (FDI) in India. The Commerce Minister also reportedly announced that this project is being reviewed by you and your office.

This act of aggression by the government violates a range of national laws and policies, including the Constitution of India, the Forest Rights Act 2006, the March 2012 order of the National Green Tribunal suspending environmental clearance of the project, the National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy 2007 as well as recommendations of several independent and government committees. In its attempt to attract foreign investment into the state, the Government of Odisha and the Government of India has circumvented all democratic norms, including the *Palli (Gram) Sabhas*, and violated the human rights of its own people.

The actions by the Government of Odisha, with the support of the police and POSCO, also clearly violate several international human rights treaties, including the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, all of which India has ratified. This recent attack on the people of the area also infringes international standards and guidelines, including the *UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacement* – which lay down obligations of both state and non-state actors.

The recent actions of the government are also illegal because the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between POSCO and the Government of India expired in June 2010.

Since 2006, the people of the area have been peacefully resisting the project because of its extensive destructive impacts on their lives and livelihoods. The non-violent resistance of local villagers to the project, however, has been met with violence, implication of false charges, and arbitrary arrests and detention of men and women. All attempts for dialogue with the government have failed, as the government has repeatedly used force with the support of the Centre in pushing for the POSCO project in Odisha.

We strongly condemn this violent and undemocratic attack on people and the violation of their human rights, including the rights to adequate housing, land, food, work/livelihood, health, and security of the person and the home.

Respected Prime Minister, since this project is being reviewed directly by you and your office, we prevail upon you to ensure:

- Immediate withdrawal of police from the area;
- Immediate release of people who have been illegally arrested and detained;
- Immediate investigation and prosecution of officials responsible for perpetuating violence against men, women and children in Gobindpur Village;
- Halting of all forms of land acquisition;
- Provision of adequate medical care to all the injured in the area;
- Restitution, including compensation for injury and the destruction of property, trees and betel-vines; and,
- An objective ‘social impact/eviction impact assessment’ of the project, as per the requirements of the *National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy 2007*, and the *UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacement*.

We look forward to an adequate response from your government, and hope that you will act in accordance with India’s legal obligations and protect the rights of your people.

**Endorsed by:**

1. Justice Rajender Sachar
2. Miloon Kothari, former UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing
3. Vrinda Grover, Supreme Court advocate, Delhi
4. Ram Puniyani, Mumbai
5. Prof. Babu Mathew, National Law University, Delhi
6. Henri Tiphagne, National Honorary Working Secretary, Human Rights Defenders' Alert – India
7. Shivani Chaudhry, Housing and Land Rights Network, Delhi
8. Kurity Roy, Banglar Manabdhikar Suraksha Mancha (MASUM) and National Convenor, Programme against Custodial Torture and Impunity (PACTI), Kolkata
9. SDJM Prasad, National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, Delhi
10. Teesta Setalvad, Centre for Peace and Justice, Mumbai
11. Ashish Kothari, Kalpvriksh, Pune
12. Indira C, Public Health Researcher, Delhi
13. Shalini Gera, Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha (Mazdoor Karyakarta Committee)
14. Enakshi Ganguly Thukral, Haq: Centre for Child Rights, Delhi
15. Sudha Bharadwaj, General Secretary, People's Union for Civil Liberties, Chhattisgarh
16. Amita Joseph, Business and Community Foundation, Delhi
17. Ashima Roy Chowdhury, Gramya, Hyderabad
18. Pyoli Swatija, Samajwadi Janparishad
19. Chandni Jagat, Shahri Adivasi Dalit Manch, Bhopal
20. Saraswati Dhurve, Madhya Pradesh Mahila Manch
21. Ranjana Padhi, Saheli Women's Resource Centre, Delhi
22. Vikash Kumar, Working Group on Human Rights in India and the UN, Delhi
23. Damodar, Revolutionary Democracy Journal, Delhi

24. Shashank Shekhar Shukla, National Programme for the Urban Homeless, Delhi
25. Deepti, The Child Trust, Delhi
26. Asit, POSCO Pratirordh Solidarity, Delhi
27. Joe Athialy, Bank Information Center Trust, Delhi
28. Maheen, Film Maker, Madhya Pradesh
29. Shivani Taneja, Educationist, Madhya Pradesh
30. Uma V Chandru, Women against Sexual Violence and State Repression, Karnataka
31. Pushpa Achanta, Women against Sexual Violence and State Repression, Karnataka
32. Kalpana Mehta, Women against Sexual Violence and State Repression
33. Kiran Shaheen, Women against Sexual Violence and State Repression
34. Ashok Shirom, Delhi Forum, Delhi
35. Soumya Dutta, Bharat Jan Vigyan Jatha
36. Lakshmi Premkumar and Aashima Subberwal, Programme for Social Action, Delhi
37. Rukmini Rao, Gramya Resource Centre for Women
38. Sanjeev, Delhi Solidarity Group, Delhi
39. Vijayan M.J., Delhi Solidarity Group, Delhi
40. Jaya Mehta, Joshi Adhikari Institute
41. Archishman Raju, Delhi University
42. Gopal Krishna, Toxics Watch, Delhi
43. P.K. Sundaram, Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace
44. Manisha Sethi, Jamia Teachers Solidarity Association, Delhi
45. Harsh Kapur, Social Activist
46. Nayanjyoti, Krantikari Naijawan Sabha
47. Harish, Inquilabi Mazdoor Kendra
48. P.K. Shali, All India Federation of Trade Unions

49. Sujit Kumar, Krantikari Yuva Sangathan, Delhi
50. Rakesh Ranjan, Nowruz, Delhi
51. Afsar Jafri, Focus on the Global South, Delhi
52. Pransh Prakash, Krantikari Yuva Sangathan
53. Sharanya Nayak, Humane, Koraput
54. Manasi Pingle, Women against Sexual Violence and State Repression, Karnataka
55. Umesh Babu, DSF-CMDHR, Delhi
56. D.W.Karuna, Chennai
57. Kalpana Mehta, Indore
58. Kavita Krishnan, Delhi
59. Gunjan Jain, Odisha
60. Faiza Ahmad Khan, Mumbai
61. Kamayani Bali Mahabal, Advocate, Mumbai
62. Nandini Rao, Delhi
63. Mamata Dash, Delhi
64. Subhash Gatade, New Socialist Initiative
65. Rinchin, Bhopal
66. Prema Dhurve, Madhya Pradesh
67. Bali Jagat, Madhya Pradesh
68. Subhashini
69. Nisha Biswas
70. Biswajit Mohanty