

Press Release by Independent Citizens Initiative,  
New Delhi 29th May 2006

## **Citizens' panel warns of civil war in Chhattisgarh** ***Calls for end to 'Salwa Judum' campaign and judicial inquiry***

An Independent Citizen's Initiative of writers, senior journalists and former civil servants visited Dantewara district of Chhattisgarh State between 17 and 21 May 2006. It traveled through the entire district talking to a wide cross-section of people – displaced villagers in camps, political leaders, government and police officials, social workers, journalists, and other citizens. It found that the situation in Dantewara district is extremely serious. There is an atmosphere of fear and a great deal of violence in which ordinary villagers, and tribals in particular, are the main sufferers. The violence by Maoists guerillas continues. On the other side, in several areas the Chhattisgarh administration appears to have 'outsourced' law and order to an unaccountable, undisciplined and amorphous group which calls itself Salwa Judum. The leadership of this group has passed into the hands of criminal elements who are not in the control of the administration. Violence is no answer to violence.

Our investigations show that the civil administration is on the point of collapse. Despite carrying letters from the Additional Chief Secretary and informing all officials of our visit, our movement was strictly curbed. We were prevented from visiting villages where serious human rights violations were reported. We were physically attacked three times by Salwa Judum members, manhandled, and our possessions stolen, with the police standing by.

We found that society has been deeply divided. Villages and families have been set against each other. Minors are being used as Special Police Officers (SPOs), and armed with lathis and guns. An entire section of society is being criminalized by being made complicit in salwa judum's violence, and also made vulnerable to retaliatory attacks by Maoists and their village level supporters. Instead of bringing in peace and security, Salwa Judum has increased insecurity all around.

The Independent Citizen's Initiative found evidence of killings, the burning of homes, and attacks on women, including gang-rape. Only the killings by Maoists are recorded, while the killings and other incidents of violence by Salwa Judum have been ignored. Arrests appear arbitrary, and several people seem to be missing. All these incidents need to be thoroughly investigated. The press is tightly controlled and intimidated, and feels unable to report the truth.

Thousands of villagers have been forced to come and live in camps. Camp conditions are seriously inadequate. Beyond building some roadside houses, the government appears to have no long-term plans for the rehabilitation or safe return of villagers.

We believe that for the violence to end, and for the citizens of Dantewara to live peaceful and normal lives, the Government of Chhattisgarh needs to immediately take these corrective measures:

1. The Salwa Judum must be stopped immediately, its members disarmed, and control reasserted by the state administration.
2. To restore governance, the government must revamp all top level administration in the area and position those known to have empathy for adivasis. The law-and-order machinery must be repaired and restored so that it is fully accountable and protects the lives, security and dignity of the citizens of Dantewara.
3. The government must facilitate and enable the return to their villages of those in camps. For this, both Maoists and the government must come to a ceasefire.

We appeal to the Government of India, jointly with the Government of Chhattisgarh, to:

4. Institute a full, impartial, credible and time-bound enquiry into the incidents of violence by Maoists as well as Salwa Judum in Dantewara in the last one year.
5. Since the Maoists are not confined to Chhattisgarh, the Government of India must start a national dialogue with the Maoists.

We appeal to the Maoists to stop violence, to facilitate conditions of peace and normalcy, and enable the return of displaced people to their own homes and villages.

The members of the Independent Citizen's Initiative were:

Dr Ramachandra Guha (historian and columnist, Bangalore)

Mr Harivansh (editor, *Prabhat Khabar*, Ranchi),

Ms Farah Naqvi (writer and social activist, New Delhi),

Mr EAS Sarma (former Secretary, Government of India, Visakhapatnam),

Dr Nandini Sundar (Professor of Sociology, Delhi University),

Mr. B. G. Verghese (former editor, *Hindustan Times*, *Indian Express*, New Delhi).

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