**Press Note**

**NHRC must monitor investigation of Maharashtra RTI activist’s murder: CHRI**

**New Delhi, April 11**: Condemning the murder of a prominent RTI activist from Pune, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative today demanded that the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) monitor the ongoing police investigation.

In a horrific incident, Suhas Haldankar was battered to death with cement blocks allegedly by a group of 11 persons, including a former corporator in the Pimpri-Chinchwad area of Pune. The attack, reported to have occurred on Sunday, the 2nd of April, 2017, the second instance of murder of an RTI activist in Maharashtra in 2017 and the third under the present State government.

*“This tragic killing highlights civil society concerns about a proposed amendment in the RTI Rules proposed by the Central Government which authorizes the Central Information Commission to close a case upon the death of the applicant,”* **said Venkatesh Nayak**, Programme Coordinator at CHRI’s Access to Information programme.

Using RTI, Haldankar had exposed several irregularities in the provision of civic amenities by the local municipal corporation. The alleged murder is said to have occurred when both inducements and threats from local politicians failed to curb his activism.

With 16 such incidents reported since 2010 (including the latest case), Maharashtra tops the list of States with the highest number of citizens murdered for using RTI to demand transparency and accountability in governance. A total of 66 RTI activists have been killed nationwide since the Act came into place in 2005.

Thirty-four RTI activists in Maharashtra have fortunately survived physical assaults while at least 38 other incidents of harassment or threats to RTI activists have been reported in the media since October, 2005. On International Human Rights Day last December, CHRI had launched its online Hall of Shame which documents attacks on RTI activists.

CHRI welcomes the prompt action of the police in apprehending some of the alleged murderers of Suhas. It demands that they diligently work to arrest the remaining perpetrators of this crime including conspirators, if any, and gather all evidence necessary to prosecute the accused.

*“The NHRC should monitor the police investigation closely to unearth any conspiracies that might have been hatched,”* **said Sanjoy Hazarika, CHRI Director**. It may be noted that because of the NHRC’s intervention in one such case, the alleged murder of Ram Vilash Singh in December 2011 in Bihar, the conspiracy angle was revealed after the local police had initially failed to spot it.

The Maharashtra State Information Commission must call for all pending RTI applications filed by Suhas before public authorities in Pimpri Chinchwad and direct them to proactively disclose all information in accordance with the RTI Act*.*

*“The Central Government should stop dragging its feet on implementing the Whistleblower Protection Act; we urge the Government to include provisions in the law to protecting RTI activists and RTI applicants from harm,”* **said Nayak**.

**For more information, please contact:**

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