PROTEST ILLEGAL ARRESTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS

Recipient of Jonathan Mann Award For Global Health And Human Rights Cannot Receive Prize Due to Illegal Detention

VIGIL FOR THE RELEASE OF DR BINAYAK SEN
12.30pm -2.00pm, 29 May 2008
Outside St. John's Church, West End, Edinburgh

Dr Binayak Sen is a renowned paediatrician and human rights and health rights activist who has been working with some of the poorest people in the world, in the state of Chhattisgarh, central India, for the last 25 years. On 14 May 2007, Dr Sen was arrested on trumped-up charges and has been imprisoned without trial ever since. This arrest has been condemned worldwide by human rights groups including Amnesty International, PUCL, Human Rights Watch, several Nobel laureates and other prominent personalities like Noam Chomsky, Aruna Roy and Amartya Sen.

In 2005, Chhattisgarh Government enacted the Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act, with barely any debate in the Chhattisgarh State Assembly. The law, one of the most draconian security legislations in the world, makes it possible for the government to keep a person in prison for an unspecified period, without any evidence. This law is being actively used by the government as an instrument to throttle the Rights to free speech, legitimate dissent, and trample the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution of India.

As a doctor, Binayak Sen is widely respected for his unshakeable commitment to providing health care to poor adivasi or ‘tribal’ communities. He was instrumental in setting up the cooperative Shaheed hospital for mine workers in Dalli Rajhara, and has campaigned tirelessly against
violations of the human rights of the poor. His work has shown that the Right to Health and other Human Rights and Civil Liberties are inextricable. On 21 April this year, he was awarded the prestigious Jonathan Mann Award for Global Health and Human Rights in recognition of his work as a public health activist and defender of human rights.

Dr. Sen was arrested after helping to expose involvement by the police in the unlawful killing of 12 tribal people. He had been a vocal opponent of the Salwa Judum, a state-sponsored militia which has massacred local people and forced thousands to flee from their homes. Behind the violence and repression is the government’s aim of displacing the poor from their land in order to hand over huge tracts of mineral-rich Chhattisgarh to transnational steel, aluminium and mining companies. Over 30 ‘Memoranda of Understanding’ (MOUs) had already been signed with these companies.

The arrests of Dr. Sen and other Civil Liberties and Human Right activists in the last year has brought to the fore the ugly face of Indian democracy – repressive laws and state machinery that continue to be used to suppress political dissent. The right-wing Hindu Fundamentalist BJP government of Chhattisgarh claims that Binayak Sen has ‘aided’ banned Maoist groups who are active in the region. The ‘evidence’ they present for this is that he had met a senior Maoist leader many times in the preceding year. But all these meetings in fact took place when Binayak Sen, as the Vice-President of the People’s Union for Civil Liberties, one of the leading and most widely respected Human Rights groups in India visited the 70 year old leader in Raipur Central Jail to provide medical and legal assistance, with the permission of the jail authorities and under their close supervision!

Binayak Sen’s real ‘crime’ is to stand by the poor and dispossessed and to speak out about the violence they are facing in Chhattisgarh.

It is not more than a year since Dr Binayak Sen’s arrest. On December 10 – Human Rights Day – Binayak Sen’s application for bail was rejected by the Supreme Court. The Indian government and the Chhattisgarh state government are determined to silence Dr Sen. We must not allow them to succeed. On May 29th, the day he is being awarded the Jonathan Mann award, we are holding a vigil outside St. John’s Church at the West End of Princes street to commemorate Dr. Sen’s achievements in the health and human rights field and gather international support for his release. This shall be followed by a march to the Indian Consulate in the same area and the presentation of a petition to the Consul General.

Do come and mark your support!

Supported by:

Amnesty International (Scotland)
Scotland against Criminalised Communities
Edinburgh Peace & Justice Centre

South Asia Solidarity Group, CMC Vellore Alumni Association – UK Branch, Dr Wendy Savage MBCh FRCOG MSc (Public Health) Hon DSc, Campaigner on Public Health, South Asian Alliance, Peace and Human Rights Trust, The 1857 Committee, Indian Workers Association (GB), Birmingham Anti-SEZ Campaign, International League of People’s Struggles, Campaign against Forced Displacement, DEEP - Defenders of the Environment and Ecology of Panjab, Hillingdon Asian Women's Communication Service

**FREE DR BINAYAK SEN!**

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