



10.9.2020

INDIA | Priest Taken into Custody

Father Stan Swamy, 83, a Jesuit priest and long-time activist on tribal rights was arrested from his residence at a Jesuit owned Bagaicha social center in Ranchi, the capital of Jharkhand state, and taken into custody by the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) on Oct. 8.

In 2017, Father Swamy garnered support from like-minded groups across different states to unite under the Persecuted Prisoners Solidarity Committee, an organization which seeks justice for prisoners who require legal remedy.

In a video released a couple of days before his arrest, Father Swamy said he had filed a case in the Jharkhand High Court on behalf of 3,000 young Adivasis (people who belong to indigenous South Asian tribes) who have been incarcerated in prison. He believes he has been deliberately targeted by the state authorities as a result of his advocacy efforts on behalf of the Adivasi community. Prior to his arrest, he was questioned on previous occasions in July and August 2020. On one occasion, the interrogation continued for nearly 15 hours over five days.

Father Swamy, who also suffers from multiple illnesses, was transported to Mumbai by plane on Oct. 9, where he was charged under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in the Sessions Court. He has been sent to Taloja Jail near Mumbai until Oct. 23. Human rights organizations and human rights defenders across India have criticized the wrongful arrest and the authorities' implication that he is associated with far-left Maoists groups activities.

Father Cedric Prakash, a Jesuit priest and a human rights activist in India told CSW, "The unhuman treatment meted out to a frail and sickly citizen of India, by the Government and particularly the NIA, speaks volumes of how this regime brooks no dissent and will not tolerate any voice of dissent that stands for truth and justice particularly on behalf of the subalterns of society."

CSW's Founder President Mervyn Thomas said, "We have grave concerns about the Indian authorities' handling of the investigation and their heavy-handed approach towards a human rights activist who has long spoken out for the rights of the tribal community. We are seeing a worrying trend in India today where voices speaking out for truth and justice are being suppressed. The government either condones, or is

directly responsible for unlawful and unreasonable treatment of those who speak out on violations in India. We call on the international community to raise these issues in bilateral talks and to urge India to restore the democratic values upon which the country was built.”