

An Open Letter to the Chief Minister of Odisha

5 February 2013

To,

Shri Naveen Pattnaik
Chief Minister of Odisha
Odisha

Dear Shri Pattnaik,

We, the undersigned, are deeply anguished over the recent attack on the people of Govindpur and Nuagaon villages of Jagatsinghpur district in Odisha who have been using the most democratic means to resist the forceful acquisition of land for the POSCO project. As you claim that Odisha is on the path of peaceful industrialization, is it a sign of peaceful industrialization to send 12 platoons of police for forceful land acquisition?

Over the past few days, the deployment of police force in the area had created tremendous tension and anxiety in people's minds that the administration will use police force to forcibly entry the villages. Since years now, the village people have been peacefully resisting any acquisition of land and have braved many brutal attacks by the police and goons. All attempts for dialogue with the administration and your government have failed as your government has repeatedly used force and coercion with the support of the Centre in pushing for the project. This aggressive move by your government is a symbol of a demolished democracy where the state itself is violating the law of land. The state is also violating all international conventions as it seeks to invite foreign capital to its land.

We were shocked to hear the manner in which the administration along with 12 police platoons entered the villages around 4am of 3 February (Sunday) 2013 and the police officials indiscriminately hit women and children with *lathis* (sticks), cut many trees and destroyed several betel vines. More than 50 persons received injuries; of them three women and one old man are severely injured. The police also arbitrarily arrested and detained several men and women who tried to resist the action. They demolished the betel vineyards - one of the most viable local livelihoods.

To be attacked at this hour and caught unaware despite countless organized attempts on part of the POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti to appeal to you and the Centre, and repeatedly so, 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. You will agree that for the state to take possession of the land forcefully is not in keeping with the constitutional rights of the people, as well as a gross violation of the Forest Rights Act 2006. This is taking place in spite of standing Gram Sabha resolutions opposing the land acquisition process and proposed diversion of forest land for POSCO project, and the National Green Tribunal suspending both forest and environmental clearances issued to the project earlier. The absence of due legal procedures for acquiring forest lands under control of Gram Sabha makes this act on the part of the state doubly illegal.

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*.

This violent act by your government and administration appears to be a result of the announcement on 28 January 2013 of the Commerce Minister that the government of India will review delays in South Korean

steel giant POSCO's Rs. 60,000 crore (USD 12 billion) plant in Odisha, as it is committed to ensuring "smooth take off" of the project, the highest foreign direct investment (FDI) in India. He also affirmed that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is personally monitoring the POSCO project, which is being followed up by the Prime Minister's Office. The announcement was made in a meeting with South Korean Minister of Knowledge Economy in Agra where the CII-organized Global Partnership Summit 2013 was taking place. Also, on 20 January 2013, it was reported that the Board of Approval for SEZs agreed to give POSCO one more year to start work on the proposed project in Odisha.

We strongly condemn this barbarous attack on people who are resisting the forceful acquisition of their own land so peacefully. And, we stand by the struggling people of your state and prevail upon you to ensure:

- Immediate withdrawal of police from the area
- Immediate release of people who have been illegally arrested
- Provision of adequate medical care to all the injured in the area
- Scrapping of all forms of land acquisition
- State to show cause for acquiring land in the area

Signed by:

Asit - POSCO Pratirodh Solidarity, Delhi

Mamata Dash - All India Forum of Forest Movements (AIFFM)

Ranjana Padhi - Women against Sexual Violence and State Repression (WSS)

D Manjit - People's Union for Democratic Rights

Amit – Krantikari Naujawan Sangh, Delhi

Harish, Inquilabi Mazdoor Kendra, Delhi

Pratyush Chandra, Radical Notes, Delhi

Pothik Ghosh, Radical Notes, Delhi

Arjun Pal Singh, PDFI, Delhi

Afsar Jafri – Focus on the Global South, Delhi

P K Shahi – AIFTU (New), Delhi

Nitin Kumar – AISA, Delhi

Sandipan – AISA, Delhi

Rakesh Ranjan – NOWRUZ, Delhi

Damodar – Revolutionary Democracy, Delhi

Kundan, DSU, Delhi

Alok Kumar – Krantikari Yuva Sangathan, Delhi

Anjani Kumar, Independent Journalist, Delhi

Ashish Kothari - Kalpavriksh, Delhi

Ashok Agarwal – Advocate, Delhi

Dr Manoranjan Mohanty – Retd Professor and Activist, Delhi

Gunjan Jain – Activist, Delhi

Kalyani Menon Sen – Feminist Learning Partnerships, Delhi

Kiran Shaheen – Journalist, Delhi

Miloon Kothari - Former Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, UN Human Rights Council

Rizwan, Delhi

Sanjeev, Delhi

Saroj Giri, Asst Professor, Delhi

Shivani Chaudhry - Housing and Land Rights Network, Delhi

Subrat Sahu – Film Maker

Surya Shankar – Film Maker, Delhi

Umesh Babu, Delhi