

Open Letter to Naveen Pattnaik, the Chief Minister of Odisha State, India

The Chief Minister of Odisha State, Naveen Pattnaik

Bhubaneswar-751001.
Odisha, India
March 23, 2012

We -human rights, labor, and civic organizations in Korea- are writing to you with our deep concern regarding the current attacks continuously made to villagers who are opposing the construction of POSCO steel plant.

Even 6 years have been passed since the project in Odisha State had begun, POSCO could never have had approval from the villagers. And conflicts surrounding the construction of ironworks are continued.

The villagers made their peaceful resistance lying down on the roads while the government of Odisha State mobilizing the police to take their lands by force. This was on the rise to international community, including Korea, as a human rights issue.

Recent few months, however, the villagers and Anti-POSCO activists are being attacked by anonymous groups of armed men. On December 14, one person was killed and many were injured by a group of armed mafias while protesting. Bapi Sarkhel is suspected to be the leader of this attack, however, Odisha police had not made proper investigation on this. Rather, questions are suggested that Odisha State is securing him.

Odisha State had not made fair work on Bapi Sarkhel, principal offender of the violence on December 14, and even had released him on February 29. And after 2 days from his release, another villager was attacked by an unidentified armed man.

A group of armed men came around 1PM on March 2, 2012 and took away Umakant Biswal, a known activist of the Anti-POSCO struggle. We got reports that he has been kept in Paradip police station and is being physically and mentally tortured. We do not know whether the attackers were the police, or the group of Bapi Sarkhel. What is certain, however, is that Umakant Biswal, who was injured, could not exercise his legal rights. We are aware of the fact that, as per the Indian Criminal code, the police are supposed to produce him before the magistrate within 24 hours of arrest. However, more than 24 hours have passed but he has not been produced before the magistrate. No one including the villagers, lawyer or even the parents is allowed to meet him in the police station.

We are concerning on the reason that why Bapi Sarkhel didn't went through appropriate investigation and the testimony that he had received all kind of conveniences. Also, we strongly question the correlation between his release and the violence 2 days after that. If POSCO and the Odisha State

government who wants to push ahead the construction are behind this series of incidents, this is gross abuse of human rights as well as significant part that damages the legitimacy of POSCO project.

There are many cases in Korea which government and corporations oppressed the resistance of civilians by mobilizing gangsters over developments. The development project that does not protect right to life and right to live could never be successful.

We request Naveen Pattnaik, the Chief Minister of Odisha State

- To make thorough investigation into Bapi Sarkhel, including the criminals of the violence on December 14, 2011.
- To punish the offenders who had attacked Umakant Biswal and the police who had violated the article 57 of the code of criminal procedure and had refused to hospitalizing and conference with attorney.
- To stop the suppression on the villagers who oppose the construction of POSCO.
- Not to push ahead the construction without the consent of villagers.

Sincerely yours,

1. Advocates Public Interests Lawyers
2. Corporation For All
3. Energy & Climate Policy Institute for Just Transition
4. International Solidarity Committee of Minbyun
5. Korean House for International Solidarity
6. Korean Lawyers for Public Interest and Human Rights
7. Network for Glocal Activism
8. People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy
9. Public Interest Lawyers' Group Gonggam
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