

Leo Saldanha, Environment Support Group:

- “The purpose of the press conference is to address the attacks on civil society, which doesn’t just mean NGOs, it also includes media, academia, and every voice which tries to build democracy in a civil way.”
- “We bring to you a serious concern of the attacks on fundamental freedoms which are central to democracy. A freedom central to the fundamental to the right of expression is the right to dissent.”
- “Each of us have the courage to stand up and fight for rights, our own rights and rights for others. We say things which aren’t popular, and we do things that appear to be against the establishment. Sometimes they are against the establishment. But we do all of this because it is part of our citizenship. It is extremely important that we understand citizenship. Conforming with the state out of fear is the death of citizenship.”
- “If we don’t stand up now, when The Quint, GreenPeace India and The NewsMinute have been attacked, as we say it is, by the Income Tax authorities and the Enforcement Directorate then there is no other reason for us to exist. These are media and civil society organizations which have made dissent central to their existence. We are all here because we believe that without the capacity to dissent we don’t have the right to exist as organizations, sometimes even as individuals. It is in the celebration of dissent that these organizations find meaning.”
- “In the case of Greenpeace India Enforcement Director with the help of state police walked in (about 10 men), with all the equipment that they need and without a warrant started scanning documents, demanding documents and sitting inside the Greenpeace office. And locked down financial freedoms that Greenpeace needs to work in this country, which means they blocked their bank accounts. They did this at a time when it is the end of the month. So none of the staff could be paid. Rents couldn’t be paid, electricity couldn’t be paid. This is part of a systematic campaign of harassment by the state, victimization of those who stand up for the victims of injustice. The message being sent is if you don’t fall in line we will come after you.
- “We aren’t accepting this anymore, we are tired of this nonsense and we are here to express our solidarity with any organization and individual across India who is becoming vulnerable because of their dissent. This forum is called Solidarity Forum for Dissent because we believe that in the celebration of dissent that democracy exists.”

Nandini, Citizen:

- “My stand on matters is equivalent to the stand of this organization, which is why I’m a regular contributor to Greenpeace. The attacks on Greenpeace is as good as attacks on resources that we and our future generations need for basic survival – clean air, clean drinking water, food, and enough land for shelter. Organizations such as Greenpeace are working towards protecting the planet and environment for the

future, and aren't just taking money from contributors. They don't work for the money but are utilizing the funds for movements that involve the preservation of the land, water and air. The question is who provided the authority to freeze the accounts of such an organization?"

- "An organization like Greenpeace has been working tirelessly towards ensuring the food we consume is safe and not contaminated. We already are facing the negative impacts of the food we currently consume, which isn't good for the health. Greenpeace was fighting such matters. However, such organizations are being silenced."

- "As citizens, organizations or individuals, we have a right to democracy and right to express. Nobody can steal this from us. We cannot let the government misuse its power and force itself upon us. We have a right to social justice and democracy and we want to utilize this right. As a concerned citizen, I ask for the injustice on Greenpeace to stop, accounts to be activated and for all the points brought forward in this press conference to be taken seriously. However, if this doesn't happen, we will stand with every organization and individual that is silenced and begin a large-scale protest against the government if this continues."

Matthews Phillip, SICHREM:

- "Last week we came to know that Indian Government has become a member of the UN Human Rights Council. I said Indian Government with a purpose because I'm not very excited about it. It isn't India that has become a member of the UN Human Rights Council. After all, now we know that the UN is only a club of governments and all these things happen internationally and India has a lot of mileage by using this image of being the largest democracy. Without dissent what democracy can we claim?!"

- "A number of civil society organizations are working for the poor, the marginalized Adivasis, Dalits, who are the voices of the voiceless. If we suppress these voices, what democracy are we talking about?"

- "We civil society organizations aren't underground operators. We are not mafia. But we are treated as criminals. Thus, far it was by abusing FCRA Act against us, Income Tax was against us. And now, they are using the dreaded draconian Enforcement Directorate per FEMA. We are only asking for at least natural justice. We are not mafia or underground operators. We are there with the people, every other day we talk to the people, we talk to the media, we talk to everybody. People know the kind of work we are involved with. Nothing is kept a secret. Details are there on our websites. We file our returns with the Income Tax. If we receive foreign funding, we file it with the Ministry of Home Affairs, we file it with the Registrar of society."

- "Without a warrant or issuing a notice and barging into an office, terrorizing the staff, and treating them like criminals! And by evening the accounts are frozen. How can something like this happen in a so-called democracy that we are talking about?!"

- "Civil society organizations aren't against investigations. We are constitutionally recognized organizations. We are registered as legal organizations. We aren't against any investigation. But there is a due process when you investigate. And when this due process is flouted, we know there is something very seriously wrong and that's the concern we have."

- “In a month’s time, December 9th, the world is celebrating the 20th anniversary of the defenders’ declaration, India is party to that. Rights and duties of the human rights defenders, where the human rights defending organizations have the right to receive funding, raise funds, organize meetings, speak to the media, freedom of expression, right to association. And this has been agreed upon, internationally committed, and this is what is happening on the other side – trying to silence the civil society groups. We have to be really concerned about the so-called democracy that we claim in this country.”

Akar Patel Amnesty India:

- “The lack of lawfulness is troubling, and the lack of a warrant (in a search) should not go unmentioned with the media or in the court. There should be an element of accountability to the state. ED has not been able to deliver according to its own books. We want the state to take note of the fact that in a public forum people have accused it of not following the law that it has set itself.”
- “Matthews spoke about a recent development in the UN. The PM tweeted this, ‘For us human rights and their protection are not merely phrases, these are articles of faith, which we are continuously upholding. But the basic human rights have been denied like during the 1977-79 Emergency, the people of India fought tirelessly and ensured democracy and human rights prevailed.’ We hold him to these words. We believe that the action taken against Greenpeace is fundamentally unlawful. Hits at dissent. Also worrying is that media houses that have been seen to be in some way as anti-establishment, have been targeted. These are very worrying portents for the future, that all citizens of India must take note.”

Manohar, Human Rights Defender Alert:

- “According to the PM’s tweet about Emergency, today’s situation is also along the same lines where one can say it is an undeclared emergency. There are multiple cases and complaints against human rights activists. All of us are aware that we have the right to express and share our thoughts, but we have come to a situation where we no longer can speak our mind.”
- “We can no longer be afraid and must stand up against being silenced.”
- “Taking the example of Greenpeace, now that the accounts are frozen, the state is asking for their accounts. But from where will they provide it if the accounts are frozen. It is time for all organizations to come together in solidarity with dissent.”

Vijay Kumar, Karnataka Janarogy Chaluvali:

- “We work on the matters of health, where we believe it is a fundamental right. Greenpeace has been focusing on protecting the major elements – wind, water, environment – since many years. However, the government of today is against the work this organization does because the government of today is not for the people or doesn’t work in the interests of the people.”
- “Greenpeace is intervening in the massacre taking place in Chattisgarh. This could be why the organization is being targeted. This is a period of undeclared emergency and it is rightfully said so. The uncontrolled government of today is breaking open our doors and forcefully taking what they want. Who gave the government this

freedom? If we continue being silent, we won't survive. We need to leave our safe zone and come join the struggle."

Aruna Chandrashekhar, Independent Journalist:

- "The violations in Chattisgarh are extremely visceral, movements have been systematically silenced in the last 4 years. There has been dilutions of laws that allow for people to express their opinions, which requires people must be consulted and consent to projects - large mining projects that are wrecking our environment and our financial and banking safety. We see contracts being given again and again to large companies that have a track record of violations, that have huge NPAs and debts that are wrecking our banking sector. Where are the raids on them?"
- "It is almost like **aap karein toh FDI hum karein toh CBI**, which is the state that we are in. What we are seeing is appalling."
- "The NewsMinute is one of the few media houses that has been relentlessly reporting on the Sterlite/Vedanta firing (in Thoothukudy). Despite this, Vedanta continues to get more contracts."
- "Curiously the government passed its finance bill allowing the BJP and Congress to legitimize accepting foreign funding from Vedanta and Dow Chemicals, and backdated for all the time they have violated."
- "Prime Minister Narendra Modi gets an award for Political Leadership on World Environment Day from the UNEP. But India refused the UNEP's assessment on the Bhopal disaster where there still hasn't been a cleanup."
- "Look at the UN chief coming to India, being invited to speak about non-violence. At the same time the country is deporting the Rohingyas right under the UN's nose."
- "We are seeing a lot in terms of PR. It has become essentially PR communication, but nothing in terms of transparency and accountability. All we seem to get is the one-way *mann ki baat*. What we need to do is fight for two-way communication, which is essentially what civil societies does, to be able to raise your voices."
- "At the same time people and the larger public needs to realize that we cannot outsource our civic responsibilities without taking some responsibility for the democracy we live in. Tax raids are one way to silence. There's an economic collapse, we are stuck in bad loans. We need to ask questions on accountability for who is being targeted on all sides of the platform."

Sana, Transgender Activist:

- "What has taken place is a type of human violence. The LGBT community condemns this. We are losing our rights in every way while we are actually working towards uplifting communities. On the one hand the government is giving us the fundamental rights including the right to express. However, on the

other hand it is just the opposite – how can the government take law into its own hands? The demand is ensure lawful process in a proper manner and release the funds of Greenpeace.”

Lekha Adavi, Alternative Law Forum:

- “The attacks on these organizations we are seeing today isn’t the first. It has been going on since the Bhima Koregaon issue. Now we are witnessing the government’s methods in different ways. This isn’t just an attack on activists or advocates. It is being done on journalists as well, including individuals and news journalists. Now the government is focusing on breaking the efforts of civil society organizations and activists. We need to show that we aren’t for it and we will fight in unity against this.”