

# Solidarity Forum for Dissent

In solidarity with Greenpeace India, The Quint and The News Minute

Released at Press Club of Bangalore, 15th October 2018



**From L-R: Manohar (Human Rights Defenders Alert), Aakar Patel (Amnesty India), Mathew Phillips (SICHREM), Nandini (Greenpeace Supporter), Leo F. Saldanha (Environment Support Group), Vijay Kumar (Karnataka Janaarogya Chaluvalli), Aruna Chandrashekar (Independent Journalist), Lekha Advavi (Alternative Law Forum)**

Over the past week, we have been witness to raids by Income Tax Department and Enforcement Directorate of the Indian Finance Ministry on the offices of [The Quint](#) and [Greenpeace India](#), two key civil society organisations of India, in Delhi and Bangalore respectively. We were to learn later that [The News Minute](#) office also had IT officials dropping in, key journalists were questioned and copies of documents taken.

In the case of Greenpeace, the ED officials had no warrant to search the office. Yet, almost 8 to 10 of them entered Greenpeace office in Bangalore, questioned key officials, searched documents and took away copies of several documents, all without any official communication or authority vested by the due process of law.

Although Greenpeace India stated clearly that they had nothing to hide and can share documents related to financial transactions openly, their accounts were frozen by the end of the day by the ED officials.

We consider this as not merely an attack on these organisations alone, but on civil society in general, media included. We note that those who are critical of the Government, as also those who are exposing and challenging human rights and environmental violations of certain Corporations, are being targeted. We also note that those who work with and for advancing the rights of vulnerable communities, especially Dalits, Adivasis, LGBT communities and women, are being systemically targeted as well, in such raids across India. Often, this has resulted in arrests of key activists and journalists.

*We wholesomely agree with Supreme Court Judge D. Y. Chandruchud who has held: "Dissent is a symbol of a vibrant democracy. Voices in opposition cannot be muzzled by persecuting those who take up unpopular causes."*

The act of Enquiry and Dissent are fundamental aspects of citizenship, and helps shape a vibrant and productive democracy. Any individual or organisation exercising this Fundamental Right of Citizenship, which is also a Fundamental Duty of Citizenship, must not be harassed or terrorised by any form of abuse of power; be this in the Government, Corporation, Public Sector, Civil Society, Academia and Media. We believe such encroachments of fundamental rights constitute an attack on the Constitutional promise of delivering a secure and fearless Citizenship for all, especially those who dissent.

The Constitution of India has vested with the citizens of the country an inviolable set of democratic rights, empowering them to live life in the true spirit of a mature, sovereign republic. Though baby steps, these constitutional rights have formed the traditional moorings of governance and withstood many challenges in the form of an imposed emergency in the 70s and the political vacuousness in later decades. Every time, democratic voices have emerged stronger. It is this culture of democratic rejuvenation that is in peril in current times.

Today's State appears determined to uproot the foundational principles of a democratic India by criminalising all and every opinion that doesn't commit to its exclusive and mono-culturist views. The belligerent and often feudal manner in which the State is using democratic institutions predatoriously against it's own citizens and civil society organisations, is a matter of grave concern. When every thinking mind is under threat, democracy suffers the most.

*Solidarity Forum for Dissent* is a platform of those who have decided to stand up and assert democratic rights of people and civil society organisations and stand in solidarity with those who are being arbitrarily targeted and subjected to abuse and harassment by the State. In the last ten days, three organisations of India who celebrate dissent, The Quint, The News Minute and Greenpeace India, were raided by the agencies of the Central Government, which from all angles appear to be an attempt to muzzle creative alternatives to the vision of the country, and threaten those who dare to dissent. The raid on Greenpeace happened even without even a warrant or a notice served on them.

The bank accounts of Greenpeace India has been frozen, threatening the livelihood of hundreds of employees there. Greenpeace is also accused of illegally channelising foreign funds into India, when independently audited statements of the organisation of the past three years very clearly show that the entire funds in the Greenpeace accounts were raised through individual donations from the people in India. Despite cooperating with the authorities, their bank accounts remain frozen.

This is a direct assault on a *bonafide*, independently functioning, environmental organisation. Now, they have been verbally communicated to provide the list of all individual donors so the agencies can make ‘random calls’ to verify the veracity of Greenpeace’s claims. This when each and every transaction is legitimate and involving bank to bank transfers. This potentially atomises state surveillance to the level of each individual who support organisations like Greenpeace, the Quint and The News Minute. The State, it seems as institutionalised the ‘*If you are not with us, you are our targeted enemy*’ idiom into its governing framework.

*Solidarity Forum for Dissent* is a platform of civil society organisations, individuals and concerned citizens that has been established to protect the space of dissent in democracy. We are together in solidarity with those most vulnerable due to their dissenting views and to assert the foundational principles of democracy in India.

Video Recording of the Press Conference is accessible at: [https://youtu.be/ d1BUYfrD6U](https://youtu.be/d1BUYfrD6U)

#### **Signatories addressing the Press Conference:**

Mathew Philips SICHRM	Vijay Kumar Seetappa Karnataka Janarogya Chaluvali	Lekha Adavi Alternative Law Forum
Aakar Patel Amnesty India	K. P. Singh Swaraj Abhiyan	Aruna Chandrashekar Independent Journalist
Nandini Greenpeace sponsor Reshma Swaraj Sanghatane	Manohar Human Rights Defenders Alert	Leo F. Saldanha Environment Support Group
Akhila Vidyasandra Advocate		Brinda Adige Social Activist

#### **Co-Signatories**

Henri Tiphagne, Advocate & Executive Director, People’s Watch National Working Secretary, Human Rights Defenders’ Alert - India (HRDA)	Reach Law  Paranjoy Guha Thakurta, Independent Journalist, Author, Publisher, Film-Maker, Educator and Consultant, on the board of Greenpeace India	Bhargavi S. Rao Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiatives Bangalore  Karnataka Sex Workers Union  Lalita Ramdas
B T Venkatesh		

Founder Member and Former Board Chair Greenpeace India	Dinesh Abrol Delhi Science Forum	R Manohar Human Rights Defenders Alert
Harsh Vardhan New Delhi	Chokkalingam, Abilash Gram Seva Sangha	Nalini, Geetha Hasirudala
Uzramma Hyderabad	Aditi Chanchani Equations Bangalore	Madhu Bhushan Activist
Harsh S Ondede	Shiva Prasanna ASJ	Kalpna Chakravarthy Activist
Aruna Rodrigues Mhow M.P India	Dr. Indira Vijaysimha Azim Premji University Bangalore	Rima Kashyap Activist
T. Mohan, Mohan and Devika, Advocates, Chennai	Rajendra Prabhakar Marg	Nirupama Sarma Leela Samson
Kirtana Kumar Infinite Souls Farm & Artists Retreat Theatre Lab (Youth) & Little Jasmine Film Bangalore	Joe Athialy Centre for Financial Accountability, Delhi	P. T. Krishnan Architect Chennai
Sana, Jagannath, Meena and Sahadan Ondede	Raghavendra B Pachhapur	Janardhan SJK Raichur
George Kutty CIEDS, Bangalore	Sachin Amnesty India, Bangalore	M Eswarappa PCRW/K
Anumita and Rajaram, Bangalore	Neelaiah RFC Swaraj	Vinay Sreenivasa Alternative Law Forum, Bangalore
Amitabh Behar, Mallika Tatavarthi Oxfam India	A Rosario Myrthi Sarva Seva Samithi	Shobha, Kaveri H M Asare
Umesh M, H M Gowda Concerned for Working Children	Vijay Kumar Karnataka S Chalovali	A Narasimhamurthy Janasahayog
Shalmali Guttal Focus on Global South Thailand	Jayant Kulkarni Wildlife Conservationist	Murali Mohan Samvada
	Dr. Sudhir Vombatkere, Mysuru, Karnataka	'Nachiket Udupa', Delhi
	Ramnarayan	Sharad Lele Bangalore
	Shanti Indian Social Institute, Bangalore	Manohar Chauhan, Senior Campaigner, Business and Human Rights,

Amnesty International India-Banagalore	Bengaluru	Walter Mendonsa
Meenakshi Subramaniam Artist, self-employed Kumily, Kerala	Shruti Ajit / Shrishtee Bajpai, Sujatha Padmanabhan, Kalpavriksh, Pune	Nalini Shekhar Bangalore
Suki Iyer Sabbatical Bangalore	Nirupama Sarma, Independent Social Justice Activist, Bangalore	Neha Nagpal None Paschim Vihar, New Delhi
Geetha Iyer, Suchindrum		Ratheesh Pisharody, Citizen, Bangalore Sharada Ganesh, Citizen, Bangalore
Uma shankari.	Shripad Dharmadhikary, Manthan Adhyayan Kendra, Pune	K. R. Mallesh, Cheryl, Ahan Bezbaroa Environment Support Group, Bangalore
Samar Bagchi		
David Selvaraj Bangalore Ramdas Rao Bangalore	Manu V. Mathai Academic Bangalore	Chitra Ravi, Azim Premji University Bengaluru
Joseph Britto,	Dr. Pisolkar Yogesh	
Dr K Babu Rao President, Human Rights Forum, Hyderabad.City	Arun Wakhlu Pragati Foundation Pune	Jinan K. B. Artiste
Pradeep Esteves Context India	Vidya Dinker Indian National Social Action Front (INSAF) Delhi and Karnataka	