

## **"Where the State Makes War on its People": Excerpts from PUCL's report on Salwa Judum**

The April 2006 document "Where the State Makes War on Its People" by PUCL (<http://www.pucl.org/Topics/Human-rights/2006/slawajudum.htm>) is, to date, the most comprehensive and illuminating account of the *Salwa Judum* movement in Chhattisgarh, and is a model of clarity and precision. Although we can never do full justice to the document, which deserves to be read in full, we hope that the following excerpts will spur anyone interested in the brutal truth behind the movement, to read the original.

### **Introduction**

"Since June 2005, Dantewada District, Chhattisgarh has been in the news for an alleged uprising against the Communist Party of India(Maoist). Most media and official reports described this movement, *Salwa Judum*, as a spontaneous and self-initiated reaction to 'Maoist oppression'... At the same time, a few reports indicated that people had been displaced in large numbers and were living in miserable conditions in camps."

"On the basis of the fact-finding, three facts stood out strongly, all of which ran counter to the government's assertions: First, it is clear that the *Salwa Judum* is not a spontaneous people's movement, but a state-organized anti-insurgency campaign. Second, it is misleading to describe the situation as simply one where ordinary villagers are caught between the Maoists and the military. The Maoists have widespread support and as long as people continued to live in villages, it was difficult for the government to isolate the Maoists...Third, the entire operation, instead of being a 'peace mission' as it is claimed, has escalated violence on all sides. However, only the murders by Maoists are recognized, and the *Salwa Judum* and paramilitary operate with complete impunity."

### **On Dantewada - Natural Resources and the Rhetoric of Development**

Dantewada district consists of a large number of fairly small tribal villages, and a few large villages. "What is pertinent is that these villages have no land rights and are at the mercy of the forest department...In total, about two thirds of the district belongs to the Forest department...Given the rain-fed agriculture, the collection and sale of non-timber forest produce at weekly *haats*(markets) or to agents is an important source of local income a fact that underlines the people's dependence on the forest, and their forced interaction with Forest Department Officials and traders."

"While the people of Dantewada are extremely poor, their land is extremely rich, both in terms of minerals and forests. When the government talks of 'development', it appears they have in mind the development of these resources for private profit as against the development of its people. When organizations and movements have pointed out that the two are not synonymous, and that the way mining and other industrial activity has been practiced in the past has resulted in the displacement and consequent pauperisation of tribals in this region, they are called 'anti-development'. These efforts at exploiting natural resources have gained momentum since the formation of the state of Chhattisgarh in 2001. The new state government has entered into agreements with ... Tatas and Essar to set up steel plants on land leased from the state.

"But nearly six decades of official boast of 'development' has little to show for it. In

fact, while literacy and health indicators are miserable, the one indicator that is thriving is the ratio of police stations to population.".. "The situation is distinctly worse regarding health facilities. Out of the 1220 villages, there is no medical facility in 1161 villages."

## **Political Movements**

### **The Maoist Movement**

"...Around 1980, People's War Group(PWG) started an organization in the area of present-day Dantewada district, called Dandakaranya Adviasi Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan(DAKMS). The earliest issues taken up by these organizations revolved around oppression and exploitation by 'outsiders', primarily the forest and revenue departments, the police and moneylenders....By the late 1980s, internal contradictions in adivasi society started being addressed.

One of these was inequality in land ownership...redistribution of the more fertile lands and grain was carried out in some areas..A second initiative was the creation of *sanghams* in villages,intended to gradually replace the traditional structures of authority at the village level. The *sanghams* are currently one of the major targets of the *Salwa Judum* as they challenge the traditional structures of local authority, and are identified with the Maoists."

"There were also initiatives at fixing prices of forest produce... The most celebrated among these was the raising the prices of *tendu patta*(beedi leaf) collection. Struggles by peasant organizations managed to raise the rates from barely Rs 2 for 100 bundles in the early 1980s...to Rs 80 by mid 1990s"

### **Salwa Judum**

"The acquiring of lands from large landholding and their redistribution to landless households by peasant organizations led to the creation of a section unhappy with the Maoists. Headmen, priests, traders and contractors in trading towns and tehsil headquarters were active part of this constituency against the Maoists...In July-August 1990 some political leaders, such as Mahendra Karma took over the operation which was called *Jan Jagran Abhiyan*. The method of the Abhiyan was to threaten a village to hand over those most active with the organization, or else face an attack. Around May-June 2005, another mobilization against Maoist organizations using local elites began. Mahendra Karma, the Congress MLA, was again at its forefront very soon. *Salwa Judum*, as it was named, means purification hunt, seemingly meant to cure tribal society of the 'Maoist illness'. The difference from before are crucial: For one, the Salwa Judum is over a wider area, involves much more intensive use of state power and is centrally part of the central and state governments' anti-Naxal policy. Two, the attacks and killings are more frequent and far more brutal."

"As a consequence of the *Salwa Judum*, the lives of thousands of people in the region are being torn apart in the course of what the DSP, Dantewada himself described as an 'undeclared war'. In just the last few months, about 30,000 people have been displaced from their homes. Approximately 15,000 people from 420 villages are living in temporary camps as refugees....It's crucial never to forget that the *Salwa Judum* could not become what it has without the extent of state support it is getting. For instance, the district collector told us that of the 150-200 *Salwa Judum* meetings that had been held until Dec 2005, he himself had attended 75 %....Also pointing to the administration's close and prompt links with the *Salwa*

*Judum* is an audio CD released by the Maoists...in which the Superintendent of Police, Bijapur district, is heard stating that Rs 2 lakhs would be given to every villager that joins the *Salwa Judum*."

### **Mode of Operation of the Salwa Judum**

"First, *Salwa Judum* meetings are organized in villages that are known to support the Maoists. The audience for these meetings are transported by buses hired or procured by the administration. Money for this comes from the central government. Attacks by the *Salwa Judum* on villages are being carried out with the assistance of the CRPF and the Naga IRB.."

"Sometimes people are killed, but no FIR is ever registered for those killed by security forces. There are serious allegations of rapes by security forces and *Salwa Judum* activists. Maoists have listed 31 cases of rape, of whom 6 women were also murdered since *Salwa Judum* began in June 2005. There are also reports that children and old people are being beaten...We also chanced upon villages where people had finally decided to 'surrender' following repeated attacks by the *Salwa Judum* and security forces."

People from the defeated villages are then forced to come and live in camps, of which the administration itself claims to have set up seventeen...*Salwa Judum* took away young people from their village and their families were unaware of their whereabouts. Since people who live in camps are forced to work as informers against members of their own and neighboring villages, and participate in attacks against them, villages are becoming increasingly divided. Living conditions in the camps are abysmal. We saw blanket distribution ceremonies in Gangloor and Meertur camps, but little else to suggest that the government was interested in the welfare of the people staying in them."

"Several villages are virtually deserted. The few we came across said they come to the villages during the day to harvest the paddy crop and return to their camps as evening falls...Across Dantewada and Bijapur police districts and especially all along the national highway, security forces and *Salwa Judum* members man checkpoints."

### **Maoist Violence**

"In recent weeks, Maoist squads have begun killing security forces stationed in Dantewada...During our fact-finding, we heard that in some cases, the Maoists had killed people simply for attending *Salwa Judum* meetings...Several people in Bhairamgarh camp and elsewhere told us of instances of threats and beatings when people chose not to ally with the Maoists..The educated youth are unhappy with the Maoist opposition to government programmes. They want government programmes to be implemented as these are a source of employment. Not being able to participate in elections is also an issue for some people.

"...The actual scale of Maoist violence tends to be exaggerated by the administration, helped by an ideologically bent and largely pliant media, to suggest the illegitimacy of the movement. A point repeated to us by everyone, including many *Salwa Judum* activists, was that the Maoist movement had a mass base among the poor for whom some very real victories have been won, especially against corrupt officialdom."

### **Non-registration of FIRs and Atrocities by Security Forces**

"Combing operations and attacks on villages by the Naga IRB, CRPF and the *Salwa Judum* leave many people dead and injured... Almost all the killings are unrecorded. Apart from killings, the administration is arresting a number of people suspected of being Maoists or Maoists sympathisers...The police only recorded crimes committed by Maoists, and the district administration only maintained records of compensation paid to the victims of Maoist violence."

"...The situation we found in Dantewada has serious and frightening consequences for the formal functioning of democracy because the civil administration now operates on the whims of the *Salwa Judum* activists and the security forces, against common people...There is conspicuous absence of any attempt by the government to understand the context of what are the genuine problems of the people in the region, and why and how Maoists took roots here."