



**Association for India's Development
Friends of South Asia**



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 15, 2008

International coalition demands repeal of repressive laws on one-year anniversary of Dr. Binayak Sen's unjust incarceration

San Francisco, CA: Hundreds of Activists from a broad coalition of 50 international human rights groups that includes Amnesty International, National Lawyers' Guild and SANSAD (South Asian Network for Secularism and Democracy), Canada, took to the streets on two Global days of Action, May 13 & 14, to protest the continued incarceration of human rights crusader, Dr. Binayak Sen. Simultaneous protests were held outside the Indian consulates in London, New York, Washington D.C., San Francisco and Vancouver, while activists in Paris, Stockholm, Boston, Pittsburgh, Houston and many other cities organized vigils, talks, and film screenings to raise awareness about the ongoing persecution of human rights activists. Over 4000 signatures from individuals around the world have been collected on petitions asking for the release of Dr. Sen. Internationally acclaimed intellectuals, including Noam Chomsky, Arundhati Roy, George Galloway, and Mahashweta Devi have all joined in urging the Indian government to free Binayak Sen and stop the harassment of human rights activists. Further, in an unprecedented move, twenty-two Nobel Prize winning scientists and economists have also appealed to the Indian government to release Dr Binayak Sen enabling him to go and receive the 2008 Jonathan Mann Award for Health and Human Rights in Washington later this month. All these documents were submitted to Indian authorities along with hundreds of faxes by individuals demanding the release of Dr.Sen*.



[Action in front of the Indian Consulate, San Francisco, CA]

Dr. Binayak Sen's case represents an alarming trend where human rights defenders that oppose state repression, including extra-judicial killings, are being held under draconian laws such the CSPA (Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act) and the UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act). Ajay T.G, an independent film maker and social activist from Chhattisgarh; Lachit Bordoloi, a human rights activist from Assam; Prashant Rahi, journalist from Uttarakhand; Govindan Kutty, editor of People's March in Kerala; Praful Jha, a journalist from Chhattisgarh; Vernon Gonsalves, an activist from Nasik; Arun Ferreira, Ashok Reddy, Dhanendra Bhurule, Naresh Bansode, activists from Vidarbha, have all been charged under the UAPA and kept under prolonged detention without bail. These draconian laws sanction the violation of due process by the state and thus contravene internationally accepted norms of jurisprudence as well as democratic governance. As Mr.Kannabiran, National President of PUCL, India, argues in his letter to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), the CSPA and UAPA operate by criminalizing the very performance of civil liberties activities, and culpability is decided upon not by direct proof, but through guilt by association. This is the context in which many activists are questioning the charges of sedition brought against Dr.Sen - for example, Ms. Shalini Gera, an activist from Friends of South Asia, points out that the "evidence" presented by the state about Dr.Sen's "Maoist connections" actually refers to Binayak Sen's meetings with Narayan Sanyal, (a jailed 70-year-old Maoist leader) that took place with the permission of the jail authorities, and under their close supervision, when Dr. Sen, as the vice-president of the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), visited Sanyal in the Raipur Central Jail to provide medical and legal assistance.

As the State Secretary of PUCL of Chhattisgarh, and the national Vice President, Dr.Sen has been amongst the most vocal opponents of "Salwa Judum", a private militia movement armed by the Chhattisgarh Government to combat Maoist insurgency. Dr.Sen earned the ire of the government for opposing Salwa Judum which has itself contributed to a spiraling increase in violence and displacement of thousands of tribals. The permanent state of war created by Salwa

Judum has led to large-scale and apparently voluntary displacement of indigenous communities, thus freeing up for corporate and industrial use, land and natural resources that have historically belonged to local communities. According to Mr. Somnath Mukherji, an activist from the Association for India's Development, "these protests are not only about the violation of the human rights of Dr. Sen - they are also about the ongoing assault on the human rights of the people of Chhattisgarh whose lives and lands are being mortgaged to a vision of development that is antithetical to them".



[Action in front of the Indian Embassy, Washington, D.C.]

For Photos, Videos of protests go to www.aidboston.org/FreeBinayakSen/media.htm

Press Contacts:

- Mr.Somu Kumar, Association for India's Development; Tel: 703-728-8987, somu@aidindia.org
- Ms.Anu Mandavilli, Friends of South Asia; Tel: 408-480-5805, mail@friendsofsouthasia.org

For more information, visit www.aidboston.org/FreeBinayakSen

(*Full texts of all the documents are available at the above website)

For Photos, Videos of protests go to www.aidboston.org/FreeBinayakSen/media.htm

Endorsing Organizations:

International Organizations:

- Alliance for a Secular and Democratic South Asia, MIT (www.alliancesouthasia.org)
- Alliance of South Asians Taking Action, San Francisco (www.asata.org)
- Amnesty International, USA (www.amnestyusa.org)
- A.N.S.W.E.R. Coalition, Act Now to Stop War and End Racism - San Francisco (www.answersf.org)
- Association for India's Development (www.aidindia.org)
- Association of South Asian Political Activists (ASAPA), Berkeley (<http://asapa.berkeley.edu>)

- Asian Law Alliance (www.asianlawalliance.org)
- Boston Coalition for Justice in Bhopal (www.boston4bhopal.org)
- Boston Mobilization (www.bostonmobilization.org)
- Birmingham Anti-SEZ Campaign, UK
- Campaign against Forced Displacement, UK (<http://tinyurl.com/6mgnne>)
- Campaign to Stop Funding Hate: CSFH (www.stopfundinghate.org)
- CMC Vellore Alumni Association - UK Branch
- DEEP - Defenders of the Environment and Ecology of Panjab, UK
- Dharma Megha, East Lansing, Michigan
- Friends of South Asia: FOSA (www.friendsofsouthasia.org)
- Gadar Heritage Foundation, Fremont (<http://gadar.homestead.com>)
- Hillingdon Asian Women's Communication Service, UK (www.hillingdonwomenscentre.org.uk)
- India Foundation, East Lansing, Michigan
- Indian Muslim Council, USA (www.imc-usa.org)
- Indian Workers Association (GB)
- Indian Progressive Study Group-L.A. (IPSG)
- India Relief and Education Fund, Fremont (<http://iref.homestead.com>)
- International Accountability Project (<http://www.accountabilityproject.org>)
- International League of People's Struggles, UK (www.ilps-web.com)
- International Service Society, Okemos, Michigan
- International South Asia Forum: INSAF, NYC (www.insaf.net)
- Massachusetts Global Action (www.MassGlobalAction.org)
- Matahari: Eye of the Day (www.eyeoftheday.org)
- National Lawyers' Guild (<http://www.nlg.org/>)
- Our Developing World (<http://www.magiclink.net/~odw>)
- Peace and Human Rights Trust: UK
- Peninsula Peace & Justice Center (www.peaceandjustice.org)
- Peoples Health Movement, USA (www.phmovement.org/cms)
- Sanhati (www.sanhati.com)
- San Jose Peace & Justice Center (www.sanjosepeace.org)
- SANSAD (South Asian Network for Secularism and Democracy), Vancouver, Canada (<http://sansad.org/Sansad>)
- SAPAC South Asian Progressive Action Collective, Chicago (<http://www.sapac.org/>)
- Seva International, Okemos, Michigan
- Sikh American Heritage Organization
- South Asian Alliance, UK: (www.southasianalliance.org)
- South Asian Left Democratic Alliance, Canada, (SALDA) (www.salda.org/)
- South Asian Progressive Action Collective, (SAPAC) Chicago (www.sapac.org/)
- South Asians Stepping in Solidarity, Harvard: SASS
- South Asia Solidarity Group, UK: (www.southasiasolidarity.org)
- Students for Bhopal (www.studentsforbhopal.org)
- The 1857 Committee (<http://1857.org.uk>)
- Vaishnava Center for Enlightenment, Okemos, Michigan
- Vedanta Society of East Lansing, Michigan
- Western States Legal Foundation (WSLF) (www.wslfweb.org)
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom - San Jose (http://www.wilpf.org/US_WILPF)