

CAMPAIGN FOR PEACE & JUSTICE IN CHHATTISGARH

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To,

Mr. N. Gopaldaswami,
Chief Election Commissioner,
Election Commission of India,
Nirvachan Sadan,
Ashoka Road, New Delhi-110001 9th September 2008

Sub: Concerns regarding preparation of Electoral rolls and other matters with regard to forthcoming State assembly elections in Chhattisgarh

Dear Sir,

We are writing to you on behalf of CPJC. The Campaign for Peace and Justice in Chhattisgarh is a campaign group formed by individuals and organisations who are deeply concerned about the recent happenings and gross violation of human rights going on in Chhattisgarh.

We are aware that the Election Commission is in the process of preparation for the State Assembly elections which are to take place towards the end of this year. We would, through this representation, like to raise our concern regarding the preparation of electoral rolls and other matters in Dantewada and Bijapur districts of South Chhattisgarh.

As you know in the districts of Dantewada and Bijapur many tribals have been living in government run Salwa Judum camps as IDPs (Internally displaced persons) for the last 2-3 years. According to recent media reports Government of Chhattisgarh claims that more than 57,000 people are living in these camps and their names are getting included in the electoral rolls for the camps. We have learnt through media reports that the Government has initiated a process of including their names in the electoral roles for the camps.

As per reports we have received from local civil society members and fact findings done by CPJC members, majority of people who were living in these relief camps have gone back to their homes in their respective villages. According to our information the number of residents in camps is not more than 10,000.

Government of Chhattisgarh has closed down most of Public Distribution System(PDS) shops in these villages. Therefore people have to come back to Salwa Judum camps to buy their ration. We are told that these details from camp ration shops have been shown to prove that 57,000 people are still living in these camps. This amounts to misleading.

We are also aware of several other discrepancies existing in the preparation of Electoral rolls: many names in from the voter's list have been dropped and in some cases names of children aged 13-16 have been included in the names. Moreover, names of several people who have fled to Andhra Pradesh and other neighbouring states have been added or maintained in the electoral rolls of Salwa Judum camps when they never lived there.

We are concerned that while many genuine voters would be deprived of their right to vote, the free and fair nature elections itself would be affected due to these discrepancies. We request you to look into the issue and make sure that the people who have gone back to their villages get a chance to vote from their own villages and their names are included in the electoral rolls for their respective villages and not in the camps where they used to live. We also request you to look into other discrepancies in the electoral rolls.

We would also like to state our concerns about voting rights of IDPs who have had to flee to nearby states of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Orissa due to atmosphere of fear in their villages in Dantewada and Bijapur for last 2-3 years. Estimates of people who have fled to these states range from 50,000 to 1,50,000. As we have stated earlier, names of several people who have fled to Andhra Pradesh and other neighbouring states have been added or maintained in the electoral rolls of Salwa Judum camps when they never lived there. We are afraid that this will inevitably result in fraud voting while the citizens themselves are deprived of their right to vote.

We would like to understand the arrangements Election Commission is making so that these IDPs are able to exercise their right to vote even if they are not able to return to their homes due to atmosphere of fear. We request that Election Commission makes special arrangements for these IDPs so that they can exercise their franchise in Andhra Pradesh itself.

According to media reports Communist Party of India has also raised their objection with you on similar points. They have informed that 50 polling booths in Bijapur and 92 polling booths in Dantewada has not been inspected by Election Commission. They feel the inspection staff have refused to do their duty, probably due to threats from Salwa Judum. We believe the same can be performed with the help of Civil society and local NGOs.

We hope that you will take cognisance of these concerns which have a serious bearing on the conduct of free and fair election in the region and take appropriate action.

Sincerely,

Sumit Chakravarttaay

Vijayan M J

Shubharnshu Chaudhary

Sridevi Panikkar

Pravin Mote

On Behalf of Campaign for Peace and Justice in Chhattisgarh

Copy to:

1. Mr. Navin B. Chawla, Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India
2. Dr. S. Y. Quraishi, Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India