

A New Era
For

JUSTICE

Justice is the voice of a coalition of organisations and networks in the UK who stand up against injustice.

The Indian state and Women

In March, the month of International Women's Day, *Justice* highlights some of the brave women in India who in recent years have stood against the government's policies of discrimination against minorities, and unlawful acts to silence human rights defenders. Many such women are in custody on false charges across prisons in India. Some of them have died while in custody or have been assassinated. A few of these incidents have been reported in the national media, but many have gone unnoticed.

Justice appeals to you to ask your local members of parliament why the UK government has ignored India's appalling human rights record and but continued to trade with India.

♣ Hidme Markam

Hidme Markam, a 28-year-old human rights and anti-mining activist, was [arrested by the Chhattisgarh Police](#), on charges for her alleged involvement in Maoist activities. Hidme was picked up and dragged to the police van while she was at a gathering on the occasion of International Women's Day, 2021. The gathering was to commemorate the death of a young woman, Padme Kwasi who had been physically and sexually abused in custody in Dantewada region of Chhattisgarh in India, in February 2021.

Hidme was outspoken against the arrests of innocent villagers in Dantewada (Chhattisgarh) and was actively involved to save Nandaraj hill, where Adani and other mining companies operate.

Rights activists across the state of Chhattisgarh, including the People's Union of Civil Liberties and Chhattisgarh Mahila Adhikar Manch (Chhattisgarh Women's Rights platform) in a statement said, "Hidme Markam, well known in the area as an outspoken voice against the building of Paramilitary Camps and as an anti-displacement activist has, as the convenor of the Jail Bandi Rihai Committee even



met with the Governor, Chief Minister, Superintendent of Police, Collector and several other such high-ranking officials raising issues of releasing wrongfully arrested or convicted Adivasis in jails, police camps and against mining in sacred lands."

In this issue

- ♣ Hidme Markam
- ♣ Padme Kwasi
- ♣ Soni Sori
- ♣ Jyoti Jagtap
- ♣ Gulfisha Fatima
- ♣ International actions

On 24 March 2021, IndiaMatters UK invited parliamentarians, academics, human rights and anti-mining protest groups to a meeting and encouraged them to write to the Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh at that time.

Hidme is still in custody waiting for her trial.

❖ Death of Padme Kwasi

At an International Women's Day event in 2021, hundreds of local women and representatives of women's rights groups in Chhattisgarh had gathered to commemorate the death of Pande Kawasi, a resident of Gudse village, under the Katekalyan police station, Dantewada. As mentioned earlier, Hidme Markam was picked up by para-military forces while she was attending the event.



9 March 2021: Women from villages gathered at Sameli (Dantewada) to protest against the death of Padme in Police custody.

Police claimed that Padme was a Maoist and committed suicide while in custody, but family members narrated a different story.



Women's activist and local leader [Soni Sori said](#), "She had told her family that she was beaten up. Her death is not a suicide but premeditated murder. ... we have not been given the post mortem report yet. No photographs have been taken of the place of the suicide. No details were shared about how she killed herself. ..."

Join us our struggle - together we bring peace, justice and happiness for all.

Write to: justice.coalition-uk@protonmail.com

❖ Jyoti Jagtap

Jyoti Jagtap, a 34-year-old singer of the [Kabir Kala Manch, a people's cultural group](#), was arrested on 8 September 2018, for her alleged involvement in



instigating communal violence near Pune, Maharashtra - a case known as Bhima Koregaon Sixteen or BK-16. Along with two of her colleagues, sixteen intellectuals, lawyers, poets, writers and social activists including Stan Swamy (who died in custody) have been implicated in the case. Jyoti and others are waiting for justice.

❖ Soni Sori

Soni Sori, a 47-year-old Adivasi (indigenous) school teacher from Sameli village in Dantewada, Chhattisgarh, was accused by the police of a connection with Maoists. Fearing safety, she fled to Delhi.



On 4 October 2011, she was intercepted by the Delhi police and was handed over to the police in Chhattisgarh. To secure confession, [Soni Sori was severely tortured and sexually assaulted in a police station](#) but she stood fast. In 2013, she was acquitted from most of the charges filed by the police (six out of eight cases) and was released from prison.

Soni Sori advocates for the rights of indigenous people and campaigns against the atrocities perpetuated by the police and para-military forces on innocent villagers in Chhattisgarh.

❖ Gulfisha Fatima

Gulfisha Fatima, a 28-year-old student activist, arrested in April 2020 under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) for her alleged role in the Delhi



pogrom in February 2020. Gulfisha from Delhi's minority Muslim community were actively involved in the protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) introduced by the current Modi government.

Arfa Khanum Sherwani, Indian journalist and the senior editor of The Wire spoke about Gulfisha, "[I am Indebted to Gulfisha for protecting my freedom](#)". Amnesty International India in their *The Truth Behind The February report* demanded a prompt, independent and impartial investigation into the violations into the Delhi pogrom and urged that those responsible be brought to justice. Their report highlighted the role of the Delhi police: "The police have tortured many in custody followed by arbitrary arrests. This is a testament to the pervasive impunity enjoyed by the police which has been enabled by the Government of India."



Largest democracy or a police state?

Letter from MEPS

On 8 March 2022, MEPS wrote to Indian Prime Minister expressing their concerns about the treatment of human rights defenders in India, highlighting the Bhima Koregaon case, activists arrested in connection with their protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the detention of Kashmiri activist Khurram Parvez.

"We are anguished by the death in custody of 84-year-old Jesuit priest Stan Swamy, which we believe would have been preventable had the octogenarian, suffering from advanced Parkinson's, been given access to timely medical care and proper treatment. ...

We are especially concerned about the use of illegal spyware and/or the planting of key digital evidence on the accused's computers, and allegations of digital surveillance of those accused in or involved in advocacy on the Bhima Koregaon case using the Pegasus spyware. This raises grave concern over the role of the government and the credibility of evidence against those jailed.

We are also worried about the abuse of UAPA to target other HRDs, such as the 18 defenders peacefully protesting against the discriminatory CAA. We are alarmed that 13 of them are still in jail, all from the minority Muslim community."

Read the full text of the letter, please [click](#) here.

Survival International's new report

A devastating [new report from Survival International](#) - launched on International Women's Day, 8 March - exposes how Adivasi women in India are being brutally persecuted for defending their lands against a massive corporate and governmental mining rush.



Protests across the world

The [India on the Brink summit](#) on February 26-28 2022 speakers featured several leading women activists and student leaders, lawyers, politicians, academics, poets, writers, and experts both from India and internationally, including Safoora Zargar, Afreen Fatima, Teesta Setalvad, Kavita Krishnan, Janet Rice and Irene Victoria Massimino. Held at the time of the horrific communal violence 20 years ago in the state of Gujarat that killed thousands and displaced hundreds of thousands of Indian Muslims under the watch of the then chief minister Narendra Modi, the summit sought to highlight and pay heed to the warning signs today to prevent genocide in India.

A Twitter storm was organised on the 2nd of March [demanding the release of Fahad Shah](#), editor of *The Kashmir Walla*, an acclaimed magazine of politics and culture, arrested on sedition charges and the draconian UAPA amongst others. He was granted bail twice by courts, only to be arrested again by a different police force under a new charge. He remains in prison at the time of writing.