



# HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS' ALERT - INDIA

NATIONAL SECRETARIAT

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**Ref No: HRDA/West/RJ/07/08/2020**

August 28, 2020

To,  
Mr Debindra Kundra,  
Focal Point - Human Rights Defenders & Assistant Registrar,  
National Human Rights Commission,  
Manav Adhikar Bhawan,  
Block-C, GPO Complex, INA,  
New Delhi – 110 023  
Email: [hrd-nhrc@nic.in](mailto:hrd-nhrc@nic.in)

Dear Sir,

**Sub: HRD Alert – India - Urgent Appeal for Action – Rajasthan: Physical assault on journalist Mr. Gajendra Singh by a public official for covering a public interest issue.**

Greetings from Human Rights Defenders Alert!

HRD Alert -India is a forum of Human Rights Defenders for Human Rights Defenders. It endeavours to initiate actions on behalf of Human Rights Defenders under threat or with security concerns.

We are writing to express grave concern over the assault on Mr. Gajendra Singh, a journalist with First India News in Churu district of Rajasthan by Mr. Govind Prasad Sharma, Executive Engineer, Water Department, Churu District.

**Source of Information:**

- Information from HRDA West Regional Coordinator
- Communication with the HRD
- Media reports

**Date of Incident:**

July 22, 2020

**Place of Incident:**

Sardarshahar, Churu, Madhya Pradesh

**Perpetrators:**

Govind Prasad Sharma, Executive Engineer, Water Department, Tehsil Sardarshahar, Churu District

**About the Human Rights Defender:**

Mr. Gajendra Singh is a journalist based in Churu district for around five years, working for First India News for last two years. He reports from Sardarshahar Tehsil on all matters.

**Details of the Incident:**

On July 22, 2020, in Sardarshahar of Churu district, the residents of Kaka Colony went inside the office of the executive engineer of the city's water department Mr. Govind Prasad Sharma to give a memorandum for concerns related to water. Mr. Sharma allegedly told the residents that request will not be met at which point the residents of Kaka Colony asked the executive engineer to give the same in writing. At this point, Mr. Sharma allegedly started misbehaving and started abusing the residents telling them to get out of his office. He allegedly threatened the residents that he would take action on grounds that they were crowding in his office and not maintaining social distance.

Mr. Gajendra Singh was accompanying the residents of the colony at their request. Before coming to the office of the executive engineer, they had given a similar memorandum at the Sub Divisional Magistrate whose proceedings had been recorded by Mr. Singh. Here too, Mr. Singh started recording the proceedings. Mr. Sharma demanded that Mr. Singh stop recording and even threatened to charge him with obstructing a public servant, if he didn't stop. He then pushed the journalist and even tried to snatch the mobile with which Mr. Singh was recording.

When the residents left the premises, Mr. Singh decided to take Mr. Sharma's view to ensure that his report on the incident has both sides. At this point, Mr. Sharma again assaulted Mr. Singh and pushed him outside the premises.

Both instances of assaults and abuses were recorded on camera and there is also CCTV footage that has recorded the incident. The same was aired by news channels.

Mr. Singh has submitted a written complaint to the Sub Divisional Magistrate of Sardarshahar, Ms. Rina Champa, on the same evening of the incident who stated on record that an inquiry will be initiated. However, there has been no inquiry report, nor has any action been taken against Mr. Sharma who continues to hold his office.

We are greatly concerned with this blatant misuse of power and criminal assault of a journalist by a government employee who was a covering news of a delegation for redressal of citizens grievances. This is also a clear abuse of power by a public servant against the public they serve. It appears that the Executive Engineer was provoked by seeing Mr. Singh recording his abuse of the citizens and thus physically assaulted him. This is not only a criminal act, but an action to prevent a journalist from their right to obtain information in public interest. Our Constitution gives journalists the right to exercise freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(a) of the Indian Constitution which is crucial to the work of HRDs, including journalists. The right to freedom of expression encompasses three different aspects: 1) the right to hold opinions without interference; 2) the right of access to information; and 3) the right to impart information and ideas of all kind. On the aforesaid it is stated that Declaration on Human Rights Defenders seeks to protect the monitoring and advocacy functions of defenders by recognizing their right to obtain and disseminate information relevant to the enjoyment of human rights.

## **Appeal**

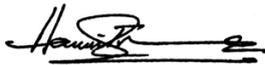
We urge the Hon'ble Commission to intervene in this matter of a public servant resorting to criminal action to silence journalists and restricting their fundamental right to access information of public interest. Thus HRDA urges the Hon'ble Commission to urgently –

- Direct the Chief Secretary of Rajasthan to initiate an immediate, independent, thorough, transparent, effective and impartial investigation into the physical assault of journalist Mr. Gajendra Singh as well as the abusing the citizens delegation by Mr.

Govind Prasad Sharma, Executive Engineer, Water Department, Tehsil Sardarshahar, Churu District.

- Based on the result of the inquiry, recommend legal action against Mr. Govind Prasad Sharma.
- Direct interim compensation to journalist Mr. Gajendra Singh for the physical assault by Mr. Govind Prasad Sharma which was also widely aired on news channels.

Yours sincerely,



(Henri Tiphagne)

National Working Secretary