

Global Briefing Warns of Escalating State Violence in Bastar, India; Speakers Call for International Solidarity and Action

On 6 May 2025, International Solidarity for Academic Freedom in India (InSAF India), in collaboration with India Justice Project (Germany), Foundation the London Story (Netherlands), London Mining Network (UK), and Indian Alliance Paris, held an international online briefing to spotlight the accelerating crisis of state repression in the Bastar region of the state of Chhattisgarh in central India. The region, which is home to many Indigenous Adivasi communities and rich in minerals, is witnessing an unprecedented militarization under “Operation Kagar” – a counterinsurgency campaign by the Indian state. Drawing from direct experience and legal expertise, speakers warned that the Indian state’s militarization, justified as counterinsurgency, has become a **cover for corporate land grabs**, leading to mass human rights violations and environmental devastation.

Bela Bhatia, a human rights defender and lawyer based in Bastar, spoke about the unjust ban on Moolvasi Bachao Manch (MBM), an Indigenous youth movement for land rights. At least 30 members of MBM have been jailed under false charges in the past two years. Bela described the scale of Operation Kagar, noting that over 250 security camps have now been established across Bastar. Close to 100,000 – possibly more – security personnel are stationed in the region, making it effectively one security personnel for every nine civilians. The large-scale militarized operations are enabled by the density of the camps – which are set up every 2–3 km – and a rapidly expanding network of roads through Bastar’s forested lands. The state, Bela said, is using drones, helicopters, Israeli weapons, and surveillance technologies, with reports of IDF personnel training Indian forces. She exposed a reward-for-kill system, where police receive monetary compensation for killing alleged Maoists, and encourages extrajudicial killings. Bela cited incidents such as the fake encounter in Mutvendi village, where a six-month-old baby was killed. “Militarisation is being justified in the name of Maoists,” she said, “but it is in fact being done to facilitate corporate interests.”

Professor G. Haragopal, Vice-Chair of the Peace Dialogues Committee, described the repression in Bastar as the climax of a long-standing neoliberal model of development adopted by the Indian state. He traced the roots of Adivasi resistance to anti-colonial movements, stressing that their land rights struggles paralleled India’s freedom movement. Although Schedule V of the Indian Constitution guarantees Adivasi self-governance, these protections have been eroded by

state-led mining and militarization. “The state uses a carrot-and-stick approach,” he said – passing progressive laws such as the Forest Rights Act 2006 while violently suppressing those asserting their rights. He recalled how the 2004 peace talks efforts collapsed after three Maoist leaders were killed by the state. When Maoist leaders raised land reform demands, the new state government withdrew under pressure from landed and mining elites. Concluding his talk, Professor Haragopal expressed cautious hope: with civil society and opposition parties now mobilizing, even the Bharatiya Janata Party that is currently in power may be forced to consider ceasefire and peace talks. “To think about peace,” he concluded, “is to first ask: why does resistance happen?”

Binota Moy Dhamai, member of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP), called for international attention and action on Bastar. He emphasized that India, as a UN member, is bound by the UN Charter and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which was developed with and affirms Indigenous peoples’ rights to autonomy, cultural integrity, and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). These rights, including traditional self-governance systems, are being systematically violated in Bastar. “They only talk about development, not the rights of Indigenous peoples,” Binota said, pointing to the collapse of civic space and the failure of states more broadly to respect international obligations including FPIC. He stressed that many conflicts could be resolved and Indigenous peoples’ rights protected if human rights frameworks were implemented. Binota urged a multi-pronged strategy that included expanding cross-border Indigenous solidarities and civil society solidarity. He gave the example of how the Indigenous peoples’ political movement which started to build around the early 1920s, from the grassroots to global level, resulted in recognition of Indigenous rights at the United Nations and in some member states. States will not act unless movements make them, he concluded.

Ana Celestial, environmental campaigner based in the Philippines and South-east Asia Regional Contact Point for the Yes to Life, No to Mining Network, drew strong parallels between state repression in Bastar and the Philippines – both facing civil conflicts driven by capitalist mining interests. Militarized repression in Bastar, she noted, reflects a global pattern. “Bastar is a microcosm of state-corporate collusion, militarization, criminalization, and mineral extraction,” she said. Governments and multinationals collude, using armed forces, draconian laws, and extrajudicial killings to suppress resistance. “Extractivism leads to the cultural erasure of Indigenous peoples,” she warned, “even as they are the original stewards of land and life.” She called for global solidarity led by affected communities and demanded an immediate halt to Operation Kagar. “The Bastar struggle is not just local—it’s on the front line of environmental

justice, Indigenous sovereignty, and human rights everywhere. Silence is complicity.” She called for ending militarization, stopping extractive projects without consent, upholding Indigenous rights and humanitarian law, and addressing the root causes of conflict: inequality, injustice, colonialism, imperialism, and plunder—from India to Palestine to the Philippines.

Tarcila Rivera-Zea, founder and President of CHIRAPAQ ((Centro de Culturas Indígenas del Perú) and founder of the Continental Network of Indigenous Women of the Americas (ECMIA) and a former expert member of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, highlighted ILO Convention 169 as a vital tool, especially where states refuse to recognise the term “Indigenous” but accept “tribal” classifications. She called for strengthening global alliances of Indigenous women and grassroots communities, and concluded by expressing continued support for Bastar, reinforcing that the defence of Indigenous territories must remain globally connected.

Call to Action

The event also saw the release of a statement launched by InSAF India and its collaborating organisation (attached) and signed by over 50 human rights, climate justice and civil society organisations and 130 individuals worldwide and reiterated its demands, including: an immediate end to state violence with demilitarization of Bastar, enforcement of constitutional protections for Adivasi communities, halt to all land acquisition without FPIC, protection of Indigenous human rights defenders, and accountability for all human rights violations and International Law.

Upcoming Event Series

On 22 May 2025, *InSAF India* and *London Mining Network* will launch a 12-part global webinar series: **“Deadline or Death Sentence: State Violence and Indigenous (Adivasi) People’s Resistance in India”**. The series will critically examine India’s 2026 “Maoist-free” deadline and its violent implications for Indigenous survival—connecting Bastar to broader global struggles against militarised extraction, from Palestine to the Philippines to Latin America.

The speakers for the opening session will be Soni Sori, human rights defender, Bastar, and N. Venugopal, Telugu poet, writer, translator and editor of *Veekshanam*.

Media Contact / RSVP: insafindia@protonmail.com