

URGENT ACTION

DEATH THREATS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER

Dalit lawyer and human rights defender, Rajat Kalsan, faces fabricated charges and death threats due to his work defending Dalit communities in Haryana state. Forced to suspend his legal practice and leave his home town, he faces life imprisonment if convicted of the charges.

On 14 September 2017, the police registered a criminal case against **Rajat Kalsan** for allegedly trying to instigate Dalit villagers to file false complaints against members belonging to dominant castes in Hansi, Haryana State. The case mentions offences including extortion, promoting enmity between different groups, providing false evidence and criminal conspiracy.

Rajat Kalsan assisted Dalit villagers from Bhatla, Hansi, to file a criminal complaint in July 2017 following a social boycott imposed against them by members of dominant castes. This included preventing their participation in community gatherings, use of social commons and enjoyment of employment rights. Subsequently, based on a petition, the High Court of Punjab and Haryana constituted a fact-finding into the boycott. On 2 September, Rajat Kalsan assisted this committee and as a result, received several death threats and was forced to flee as he feared assault by a group of dominant caste members.

Amnesty International believes the complaints filed against Rajat Kalsan are politically motivated. This is not the first time that he has been targeted for protesting against human rights violations and these multiple, unsubstantiated criminal allegations appear to indicate a systematic campaign to vilify him.

Rajat Kalsan remains at risk of arrest and, fearing for his safety, has been forced to stop his legal practice and has not been able to return home since fleeing his village over a month ago. If convicted of the charges filed against him, he could face a sentence of life imprisonment.

Please write immediately in English or your own language, urging authorities to:

- Drop all politically motivated cases against Rajat Kalsan;
- In consultation and agreement with Rajat Kalsan, promptly implement measures to guarantee his safety and enable the continuation of his work;
- Immediately conduct a prompt, thorough and impartial investigation into the threats and attacks against Rajat Kalsan, and bring suspected perpetrators to trial, according to international fair trial standards.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 4 DECEMBER 2017 TO:

District Superintendent of Police
Manisha Choudhary
Police Line Hissar,
Hisar, Haryana 125001
Tel: +91 1662-232307
Email: sphsr@hry.nic.in
Salutation: Dear Madam

Chief Minister of Haryana
Manohar Lal Khattar
Kothi No. 1, Sector – 3
Chandigarh, India, PIN: 160030
Tel: +91 172- 2749409
E-mail: cmharyana@nic.in
Salutation: Dear Chief Minister

And Copies to
Focal Point for HRDs
Srinivasa Kammath
National Human Rights Commission
Block-C, GPO Complex, INA
New Delhi, India, PIN: 110023
Tel: +91 11 2465 1330
Email: hrd-nhrc@nic.in

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY MR YASHVARDHAN KUMAR SINHA, Office of the High Commissioner for India, India House Aldwych WC2B 4NA, 020 7836 8484, Fax 020 7836 4331, info.london@hcilondon.in, www.hcilondon.in, salutation: Your Excellency

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The caste system in India is based on ascribed group identities. Dalits, or so-called 'untouchables' are at the bottom of the caste system and are often discriminated against by the dominant castes. Rajat Kalsan has frequently represented Dalits in Haryana State, Northern India, who have faced discrimination and violence by members of dominant castes. These have included cases of gang-rapes, killings and house-burnings.

Rajat Kalsan has been harassed and intimidated in the past for his work defending the rights of Dalit people. In 2015 and 2016, two other cases were filed against him in reaction to his work against atrocities committed by dominant caste members. These cited accusations of rioting and public disruption, among others.

During the course of his work in the defence of Dalit human rights, Rajat Kalsan has faced multiple death threats and physical assaults. In 2011, he was provided police protection. The protection was withdrawn in 2016 without any apparent reassessment of the risks he faces.

The threats and charges against Rajat Kalsan are part of a growing trend of threats, harassment and killings against human rights defenders in India. Human rights defenders are working in increasingly hostile environments and are facing numerous hurdles in their work. These include fear of violence, state reprisal, clampdown on funding and punitive laws.

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