Ms Gaitri Issar Kumar

The Indian High Commissioner

India House

Aldwych

London WC2B 4NA February 2021

Your Excellency,

I write to express my deep concern at the clampdown by the Indian government on human rights activists, journalists, lawyers and peaceful protesters, amid increasing repression of the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, shrinking civic space and hindering of legitimate human rights work.

In recent years, Amnesty International India has faced harassment and intimidation at the hands of the authorities, and in September 2020 was forced to halt its legitimate human rights work when the Enforcement Directorate of the Ministry of Finance froze its bank accounts. This was done without the prior notice required by law, and meant that all Amnesty India staff lost their jobs with immediate effect and without any severance pay or the salaries they were owed.

Amnesty International India has submitted several petitions to unfreeze the accounts, and in a welcome decision, on 16 December 2020, the Karnataka High Court granted partial relief, unfreezing Rs 60 Lakh. While this is a positive development, it is not enough to enable Amnesty India to pay the salaries due to its staff or to resume its human rights work. It is imperative that all of Amnesty India’s bank accounts be fully unfrozen without further delay.

India has a proud tradition of a thriving civil society and free press, in line with the strong human rights guarantees laid down in its Constitution and its legal obligations, as a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to respect the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. India must reverse its current course of trampling internationally recognised human rights.

We urge you to convey the concerns expressed in this letter to the Indian government and to explore ways to lift the restrictions currently imposed on civil society and thus to enable organisations and individuals to carry out human rights work without fear of reprisals.

Thank you for your consideration

Yours sincerely,