

India: Ensure justice for Gauri Lankesh and protect space for dissent as a democratic value

(Kathmandu/Bangkok: 6 September, 2017) – The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) condemns the assassination of Gauri Lankesh, a senior journalist, writer and human rights defender, in Bangalore on 5 September 2017. Lankesh, aged 55, was the editor of the weekly Kannada tabloid ‘Gauri Lankesh Patrike’. She was known for her stance against politics of hate, corruption and was an uncompromising voice for freedom, human rights and justice.

Media reports indicate that she was fatally shot from close range in the head and chest outside her residence by assailants on motorcycles. Her body was later moved to Victoria Hospital in Bangalore for postmortem.¹

As an editor of the tabloid, she occasionally faced opposition for her secular views and criticism of right wing politics. In November 2016, she was found guilty of defamation in a case involving a ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) parliamentarian and was sentenced to six months in jail. She was later released on bail.

Lankesh firmly stood against communal and undemocratic politics and was a fearless voice for freedom of expression in India. Recently, she was also involved in the reintegration effort of many Naxalites into mainstream with the co-operation of the Karnataka government.²

‘The killing of Gauri Lankesh is another example of silencing the voices for freedom, human rights and democratic values’ said John Samuel, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA. ‘The proponents of politics of hate and exclusion are posing great challenge for democracy and human rights in India. We call up on the government to immediately arrest the perpetrators and ensure a democratic space for the freedom of expression and secure environment for journalists’, he added.

Gauri Lankesh is the fourth writer-activist killed in recent years, following Dr. Naredra Dabolkar, Govind Pansare and Dr. MM Kalburgi, noted writers and civic leaders, who were killed in similar attacks for their critique of politics of hatred nurtured under the ideology of Hindutva in India.³

FORUM-ASIA is concerned that these attacks indicate a planned effort to stifle freedom of expression and undermine the promises of democratic principles and practices of the largest electoral democracy in the world. It urges the Government of India and the State government of Karnataka to ensure an immediate, thorough, effective and impartial investigation into the murder of Gauri Lankesh.

1<http://www.ndtv.com/bangalore-news/senior-journalist-gauri-lankesh-shot-dead-at-her-residence-in-bengaluru-1746480>

2<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-41169817>

3<http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/gauri-lankesh-s-killing-brings-focus-back-on-murders-of-right-wing-critics-kalburgi-pansare-dabolkar/story-XgzqWPjEJFyqhgIcVQUMaN.html>

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It also calls upon the National Human Rights Commission to intervene in these attacks systematically directed at human rights defenders and, by implication, at the constitutional guarantees of fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of expression.

FORUM-ASIA also urges the Government of India to undertake all measures necessary to stop further killing of journalists, writers and civic activists, and abide by its human rights commitments under national and international laws, which include unhindered space for dissent and freedom of expression.

About FORUM-ASIA:

FORUM-ASIA is a regional human rights group with 58 member organisations in 19 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expression, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratization.

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