Human rights defender Surju Tekam arrested by Chhattisgarh Security Forces

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On 2 April 2024, indigenous human rights defender Surju Tekam was arrested following a raid on his home by security forces in Chhattisgarh state, India. He is held under the regressive Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and the Arms Act and has been denied bail by the National Investigation Agency Court in Bilaspur. Surju Tekam's arrest stems from his vocal advocacy on behalf of peaceful local movements against increasing human rights violations, forcible land acquisition for corporate interests, and militarization in the state.



Surju Tekam is an indigenous human rights defender and the convenor of the Bastar Coordination Committee of Mass Movements (Bastar Jan Sangharsh Samanvay Samiti) and the Vice-President of Sarva Adivasi Samaj, a collective of all Adivasi organizations in Chhattisgarh. He has led major protest movements of the Adivasi community in Chhattisgarh against corporatization and militarization, and has been vocal against human rights violations by security forces, including extrajudicial executions, arrests of community leaders, and forced evictions.

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On 2 April 2024, around 4:00AM, Surju Tekam's residence was raided by security forces, and he was subsequently arrested under the UAPA and the Arms Act. He was produced before the NIA court in Bilaspur and denied bail. Surju Tekam's family members allege that literature associated with the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist) (CPI(M)) and weapons were planted in his residence by security forces. The police have alleged that Surju Tekam has been mobilizing Adivasis on behalf of Maoist organizations. He has been arrested under the UAPA and the Arms Act, making procuring his release on bail extremely difficult.

Arrests of indigenous human rights defenders in Chhattisgarh under accusations of Maoist links have been used as a means of persecution to stifle dissent and undermine their legitimate demands for the rights of Adivasi communities in the region. The arrest of human rights defender Surju Tekam in the period leading up to the national elections in India has raised concerns that it is aimed at silencing his advocacy against state abuse and violations.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the arrest of human rights defender Surju Tekam and views it as a reprisal for his legitimate and peaceful human rights work. It urges the authorities in India to immediately release Surju Tekam and drop all charges against him.