

# URGENT Action



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**INDIA:**

**14.02.08**

India: Many villagers died due to state led terror – no compensation and rehabilitation for the affected people in Nandigram, West Bengal

Many villagers in Nandigram, women and children died when the armed goons of CPIM (Communist Party of India (Marxist)) opened fire on a peaceful rally on 10.11.2007. Villagers have been opposing for 11 months a proposed Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Nandigram, which would displace more than 100,000 people from their homes and agricultural lands. Official sources have confirmed the death of three villagers so far while according to unofficial sources more than 40 villagers died in the violence in Nandigram. More than 40,000 homeless poor in Nandigram who had to seek refuge from the violence in temporary relief shelters are living under constant threats and have lost everything including their huts and small assets which would allow them to earn a living. Their livelihoods are at stake, their right to food is severely endangered.

## Background

On July 31, 2006, the West Bengal government had signed an agreement with the MNC Salim Group of Indonesia to implement various 'developmental' projects, including the setting up of a mega chemical industrial estate, a chemical special economic zone (SEZ) at Nandigram. Special Economic Zones (SEZ) are zones which are governed by a special set of rules to facilitate foreign direct investment for export-oriented production. When deciding upon the establishment of a SEZ, only economy-related issues have to be checked, e.g. generation of additional activity and employment opportunities. Possible human rights violations or the evictions of Adivasis do not have to be assessed.

For the planned SEZ at Nandigram, nearly 20,000 acres (8,000 hectares) would be acquired, which would lead to the eviction of about 100,000 people, mainly small and marginal farmers, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers, who depend on their land for survival. No compensation and rehabilitation package has been announced for them so far. The majority of the people in Nandigram would be unable to find alternative livelihood opportunities, if evicted from their villages, as they are only skilled farmers and have never practiced any other occupation. Lands in Nandigram are fertile agricultural lands and partly irrigated.

Nandigram experienced unprecedented mass resistance in March 2007 when the State government tried to acquire several villages for the construction of the SEZ. At that occasion police firing claimed the lives of 14 peasants who were taking part in a peaceful demonstration against the proposed land acquisition plan in the area. During the past 11 months in Nandigram more than 20 villagers lost their lives in police firing and attacks of the goons of the ruling party. On 10th of November 2007 many villagers, including women and children died when the armed goons of CPIM opened fire at a peaceful rally of the villagers. As a result of this offensive, villagers from Nandigram Block 1 and block 2 fled to temporary relief shelters, while the armed goons of CPIM combed the villages, looted properties, burned huts and inflicted gender violence on village women whoever they came across.

The police remained a silent spectator during the violent attacks in Nandigram. Instead of upholding law and order there, police at the behest of ruling party refused to give protection to the poor and threatened villagers, thus allowing the situation to worsen in the area. Many representatives of Civil Society, media and prominent personalities of West Bengal and other parts of India, who had voiced their protest against this violence and wanted to reach the victims with relief, had been arrested and harassed by police.

At present the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) has been sent from Delhi by the Central Government to take control over the situation. Nevertheless the villagers continue to be threatened by the armed goons and do not have safe access to economic activities. The villagers have been forced now to return to their homes but their assets and properties have all been destroyed. Moreover the Government decided to remove the CRPF from the area and the villagers are protesting against this decision because they think that if the CRPF is removed the violence and torture will increase in Nandigram.

FIAN has already intervened in this case with special intervention letters (s706ind dated 5-2-07, s0713ind dated 19-3-07, and s0729ind dated 19-11-07) and one urgent action (o622 dated 21-12-06).

**FIAN – With human rights against hunger!**

### **FIAN Mandate**

As a state party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, India and therefore the state of West Bengal is duty bound under international law to respect and protect the peasants' right to adequate food. By the brutal attacks on the villagers leading to exodus to relief shelters, India and the state of West Bengal violate these persons' human right to food. Their right to adequate food is denied since most of them no longer have their former resources for subsistence. Very few realistic alternatives (of paid employment) are available for them in order to sustain themselves and their families. By not ensuring livelihood security for the villagers of Nandigram and rehabilitation and compensation, the state of West Bengal is violating the right to food of these people.

### **Call to Action**

Please write a polite letter to Shri Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, Chief Minister of West Bengal, with copies to Shri Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India; Shri Abdur Rezzak Mollah, Minister in Charge, Land and Land Reforms Department, and Hon'ble Justice Shri Shyamal Kumar Sen, Chairperson, West Bengal Human Rights Commission asking them to stop the ongoing violent oppression and to make sure that the long term livelihood of the people affected by the SEZ is ensured.

### **Addresses**

Shri Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee  
Chief Minister,  
Government of West Bengal,  
Writers' Building  
Kolkata – 700 001, India  
Fax: 009133-22145555 and/or –  
22145588 and/or– 22145480

Shri Manmohan Singh  
Prime Minister of India  
Room 152, South Block  
New Delhi – 110001, India  
Fax: +91-11-23016857

Shri Abdur Rezzak Mollah  
Minister in Charge  
Land and Land Reforms  
Department  
Writer's Building  
Kolkata 700 001, India  
Fax: 009133-22144025

Hon'ble Justice Shri Shyamal  
Kumar Sen Chairperson  
WB Human Rights Commission  
50, Ramkanta Bose Street  
Kolkata 700 003, India  
Fax: 0091332479963

***Please inform FIAN  
International about any  
response you receive  
to your faxes and letters.***



**FIAN International Secretariat**  
P.O. Box 10 22 43  
D-69012 Heidelberg  
Tel: +49.6221 653 00 30  
Fax: +49.6221 830 545

**End of Action:  
April 14th,  
2008**

***FIAN – With human rights against hunger!***

Shri Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee  
Chief Minister,  
Government of West Bengal,  
Writers' Building  
Kolkata – 700001, India  
Fax: 009133-22145555 and/or -22145588 and/or- 22145480

Honorable Chief Minister,

Recently, I have heard the disturbing news that villagers from Nandigram, who in the beginning of this year resisted land acquisition drive of the state government for the construction of a Special Economic Zone, have once again become helpless victims of the brutal attacks: On 10.11.2007 armed goons of the CPIM opened fire on peaceful rallies against the proposed land acquisition killing several villagers including women and children and injuring hundreds in Nandigram. The official sources confirmed the death of three villagers so far whereas unofficial sources claimed that more than 40 villagers died in these incidents of violence. The brutal attacks on villagers in Nandigram leading to an exodus of the villagers to relief shelters has endangered their lives and livelihood security.

As the armed goons of CPIM combed the villages, looted properties and burnt huts, more than 40'000 people lost all their land and possessions which had allowed them to earn a living. Their livelihoods are at stake and their right to food is endangered. Reportedly the majority of evicted persons are small and marginal farmers, share croppers and agricultural labourers, depending on their land for their survival. As they are only skilled farmers and have never practiced any other occupation, they would be unable to find alternative livelihood opportunities. No adequate compensation or rehabilitation package has been offered to the villagers yet.

The police remained a silent spectator during the violent attacks in Nandigram. Instead of upholding law and order there, police at the behest of CPIM refused to give protection to the poor and threatened villagers, thus allowing the situation to worsen in the area.

As a state party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, India and therefore the state of West Bengal, is duty-bound under international law to respect and protect the peasants' human right to adequate food. As a person working internationally for the right to feed oneself, I would like to ask you to:

1. Take immediate action to stop the ongoing threats and reign of terror in Nandigram;
2. Take immediate measures to ensure access to land for the peasant families and ensure that the villagers can retain their physical integrity and can pursue their regular economic activities;
3. Guarantee adequate compensation and rehabilitation packages for all the villagers who suffered losses from this large-scale violence in Nandigram, so that they will be able to sustain their livelihood;
4. Take appropriate action against all government officials/police who remained silent spectators to this mass attacks/killings and who played a role in inflaming the situation there.

Please inform me about the steps you plan to take in this matter.

Yours sincerely,