



Ref: Threat to life of Dr Ram Puniyani, Rationalist and Secular Activist

To
Justice HL Dattu,
Hon. Chairperson,
National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)
New Delhi

Hon'ble Chairperson,

We are extremely concerned about the threats to noted rationalist and civil rights activist Dr Ram Puniyani's life. The threats were made over the telephone, twice last night, ie on June 6, 2019. Resident of Powai suburb in Andheri, Dr Puniyani has registered a complaint with the Powai Police station (also attached here) this morning. He has also written to the Commissioner of Police, Mumbai, Shri Sanjay Barve urging action against the callers and adequate security and protection.

Sir given the NHRC's mandate to ensure the free and safe activities to promote human rights and Constitutional values, and the imminent threat to Dr Puniyani's life, we urge urgent action in the matter.

Sir we are especially heartened by your esteemed self's words from last Human Rights Day, December 9, 2018:

["NHRC Chairperson's message on 'Human Rights Defenders Day'"](#)

"The National Human Rights Commission of India considers the Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) as integral to its endeavour to promote and protect the human rights of the common man. 9th of December, the day when the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders was adopted in 1998, is a day when the Commission takes the opportunity to acknowledge the contributions made by all Human Rights Defenders and for the efforts made by them at personal risk, at times even in adverse circumstances for the promotion and protection of human rights....."

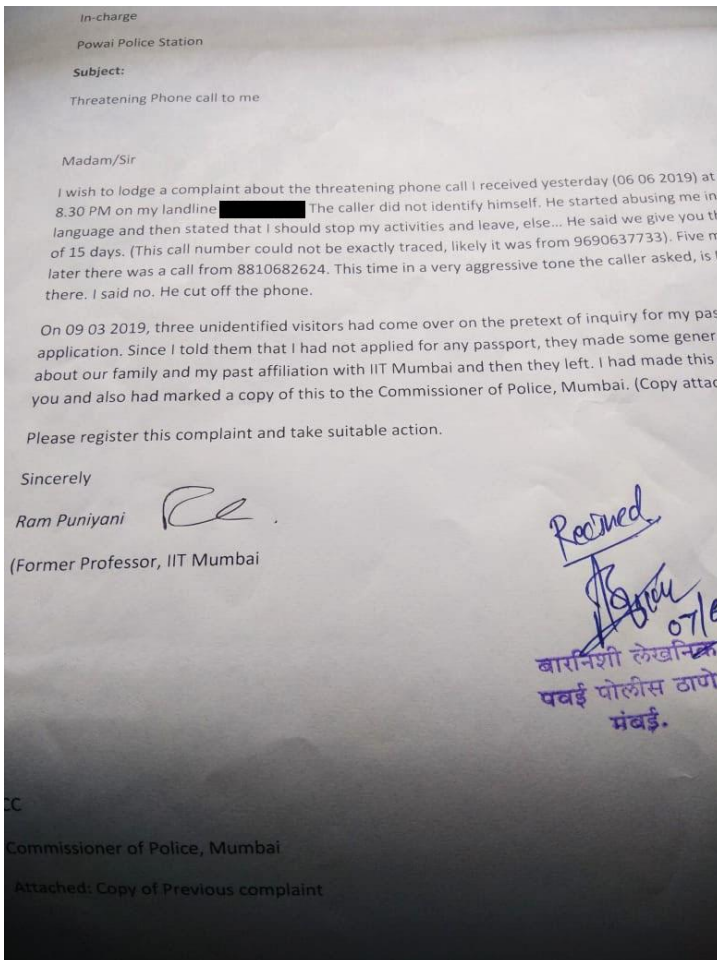
Complaints received in the Commission pertaining to HRDs have been accorded high priority and immediate/necessary relief has been provided, as per merits, to the victims. The Commission assures of its continued support for the protection of bonafide interests and causes the Human Rights Defenders stand for. The Commission also supports the declaration of 9th of December as the Human Rights Defenders Day as this will provide an impetus to the role being played by the Human Rights Defenders."

Sir we urge urgent action in this regard:

Facts of the Case

Noted academic and prominent civil society member, professor Ram Puniyani has received threats and verbal abuse from unidentified goons on June 6. The former IIT Bombay professor, who is also a well-known rationalist, received the threats by phone at night. Dr Puniyani has now registered a complaint with the Mumbai Police. Given his persistent and relentless campaign for rationalist thought, a syncretic understanding of history --with lectures and workshops held allover India-- these threats can only be seen as serious.

The first call was made to his landline at about 8:30 PM and received by Dr Puniyani's brother-in-law. The caller was abusive and aggressive and kept alleging that Dr Puniyani was anti-Hindu. The caller threatened that Dr Puniyani must stop his activities or face the consequences. The caller said Dr Puniyani must leave in 15 days. Five minutes later, there was another call which Dr Puniyani received himself. Once again, using a very aggressive and threatening tone, the caller demanded to know if he was speaking to Dr Puniyani himself. The professor declined and the caller hung up, but this time his number could be identified. Dr Puniyani's letter to the police and the complaint registered by them may be viewed here:



अदखलपात्र गुन्ह्यांचे संबंधातील प्रथम खबरी अहवाल
(कलम १५५, फौजदारी वृक्ष प्रक्रिया संहिता)

अदखलपात्र गुन्हा नोंदणी क्र. २६६२/१९ तारीख २७/०६/२०१९

पोलीस ठाणे पत्राई
१) कायदा शा. द. ति. क्र. ५०६, ५०७ तारीख २७/०६/२०१९ वेळ ०६:५०
२) गुन्हा घडल्याचे ठिकाण/दरम्यान/कामगार कोर्ण तारीख २७/०६/२०१९ वेळ ०६:५०
अ) पोलीस ठाण्यास माहिती मिळाल्याची तारीख २७/०६/२०१९ वेळ ०६:५०
ब) पोलीस ठाणे दैनंदिनी संदर्भ. दा.द.क्र. वेळ

३) तक्रारदाराचे नांव व राहण्याचा पत्ता श्री. नराम सुनीलजी व्हा. ५३ नॉर्. ३६६ रोड/मिर्जापूर शा. ति. तहसील/वडवळ वि. नं. २००, ९१०२, रामबाण शा. ति. तहसील/मिर्जापूर, ५३ पो. नं. ४३२०१६१०५३, पो. को. २६७०६१६१	३) (ब) विरोधकांची नावे व पत्ते पो. नं. २६१०६३२६५ " ९६९०६३७७३३
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४) तक्रारीची थोडक्यात माहिती :
श्री. नराम सुनीलजी व्हा. ५३ नॉर्. ३६६ रोड/मिर्जापूर शा. ति. तहसील/वडवळ वि. नं. २००, ९१०२, रामबाण शा. ति. तहसील/मिर्जापूर, ५३ पो. नं. ४३२०१६१०५३, पो. को. २६७०६१६१ यांचे मो. क्र. ९६९०६३७७३३३ व ९६९०६३७७३३३ वरून मिळालेली कट्टीत भरण्याची तक्रारी दिली आहे. तक्रारदाराचे नांव व राहण्याचा पत्ता आहे.

५) साक्षीदारांची नावे व पूर्ण पत्ते :

अहवालाची प्रत मिळाली. या प्रकरणी फौ. द. प्र. सं. नुसार संबंधीत कोर्टाकडून दाद मिळविण्याची समज

तक्रारदाराची सही / अंगठा

ठाणे अंमलदार / कर्तव्यावरील अधिकाऱ्याची स्वाक्षरी
नांव : आर. डी. सोयाने
हुद्दा : पो. को. २६७०६१६१

Sir, CJP has spoken to Professor Puniyani and he has said, "This is extremely concerning and disturbing. My family is worried about my safety. I hope the authorities take this seriously. This is not the first time that I have faced such intimidation."

The threatening calls are especially curious in light of a visit by ‘plain clothes’ police men to the professor’s home in March 2019 on the pretext of some enquirers related to his passport. Such enquiries are usually conducted by uniformed personnel. Also, curiously, neither Dr Puniyani nor anyone from his family had applied for a passport to merit such a visit in the first place. Professor Puniyani managed to get CCTV footage of these plainclothes men.

In light of crackdowns against activists and civil society members by a proto-fascist regime, this incident highlights how truly serious the State’s vendetta has become. Also given how rationalists like Govind Pansare, Narendra Dabholkar, Gauri Lankesh and MM Kalburgi have been gunned down in cold blood by right wing supremacists, the threat to professor Puniyani’s life is grave.

Activists and writers from Mumbai and across India have condemned the threats. Former senior police officer and supercop Julio Riberiro has also reportedly taken up the incident very seriously.



We urge Sir that urgent action be taken in *both, booking the culprits and also providing proper protection to Dr Puniyani.*

Yours in struggle and in anticipation,

Teesta Setalvad
Secretary
CJP

Further Details

Ram Puniyani writes to Police Commissioner about receiving threats

After receiving abusive and threatening calls late on Thursday night (June 6), senior academic and activist, Dr Ram Puniyani has, apart from registering a complaint, also intimated the Commissioner of Police, Mumbai, Shri Sanjay Barve about the details regarding the threats to his life.

Below here is the email sent by Dr Puniyani to the Commissioner of Mumbai urging an appointment with other activists to impress upon him the seriousness of the matter:

Dear Sir

I got a threatening calls on my landline no. (details below). The person abused me saying I am writing/speaking against Hindus. It was a threat to stop my activities.

Some concerned citizens and I will like to call upon you in this matter.

Sincerely

Ram Puniyani



Here is the text of the compliant submitted to the Powai police station on June 7, 2019

To

In-charge
Powai Police Station

Subject:

Threatening Phone call to me
Madam/Sir

I wish to lodge a complaint about the threatening phone call I received yesterday (06 06 2019) at around 8.30 PM on my landline. The caller did not identify himself. He started abusing me in a filthy language and then stated that I should stop my activities and leave, else... He said we give you the time of 15 days. (This call number could not be exactly traced, likely it was from 9690637733). Five minutes later there was a call from 8810682624. This time in a very aggressive tone the caller asked, is Doctor there. I said no. He cut off the phone.

On 09 03 2019, three unidentified visitors had come over on the pretext of inquiry for my passport application. Since I told them that I had not applied for any passport, they made some general inquiries about our family and my past affiliation with IIT Mumbai and then they left. I had made this complaint to you and also had marked a copy of this to the Commissioner of Police, Mumbai. (Copy attached)

Please register this complaint and take suitable action.

Sincerely

Ram Puniyani

(Former Professor, IIT Mumbai)

Following the incident in March, when 'plainclothes' policemen went to Puniyani's home on the false pretext of conducting 'passport related' enquiries, several prominent members of civil society had written to the police commissioner asking him to take cognisance of the clear and present danger to professor Puniyani's life. Here is a copy of the text of that letter:

To

The Commissioner of Police

Mumbai

Dear Sir,

We the undersigned strongly condemn the way in which attempts were recently made to intimidate Prof Ram Puniyani by people supposedly belonging to CID. We fear that it is to silence his voice which has always remained critical of communal forces and has fought for peace and harmony.



We are told that on 9th March three men who said they were from CID visited his home in the garb of an enquiry for passport, which neither Prof Ram Puniyani had applied for nor did anyone else from his family applied for one. What is worrisome is that they asked all kinds of objectionable questions to him and his family members.

Considering that voices of dissent have been targeted since the past five years we feel that this can be a precursor to involve him in some legal hassles, or implicate him in some case so that he is silenced.

It need be underlined here that Prof Ram Puniyani, who was a professor in biomedical engineering at the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology Bombay had taken voluntary retirement in December 2004 to work full-time for communal harmony in India.

Author of many books on communal harmony and secularism, he writes regularly in different publications to strengthen voices of sanity and has consistently questioned and challenged divisive forces of various kinds and has even received the prestigious Indira Gandhi Award (2006) and National Communal Harmony Award (2007) apart from many other awards for his work.

We demand that an enquiry be ordered into this whole episode and the guilty be brought to book for their act of intimidating a widely known writer and noted activist.

Endorsed by

Abdussalam Puthige
Abha Bhaiya
Abhishek Srivastava, Ghaziabad
Ajay Malkani
Alakbir, Varanasi
Alban D'Souza
Ali Ahmed
Ali Asghar , Hyderabad
Alok Agarwal, Narmada Bachao Andolan
Altaf Malik
Alwyn D'souza, Indian Social Institute, Bengaluru
Amar Jesani
Amita Dyuti Kumar, Working President, APDR, Calcutta
Amitabh Pandey
Ammu Abraham
Andrew Vazhakkall
Angeline Devapriya J , student, Mumbai
Anil Hebbar, Entrepreneur and Social Activist
Anita Patil-Deshmukh
Anjali Monteiro, filmmaker, Mumbai
Ankur Jaiswal, Delhi
Anuradha Pati
Anwar Bagban, APCR, Pune
Aparna, Varanasi
Apoorvanand , academician, writer, Delhi
Arati Pinto
Arshie Qureshi, Kashmir Women's Collective
Arun Kant Shukla
Arun, Revolutionary Writer's Association, A.P.
Aruna Burte



Arundhati Dhuru
Ashish Thorat , Senior Executive Secretary , Bombay YMCA
Asif Mohammad
Asif U K, Abu Dhabi
Asit Das
Ayesha Minhaz, Journalist, Hyderabad
B.C. Mehta
Baijnath Ganwar, IPTA, Azamgarh
Balakrishnan P K
Battini Rao, Convener, People's Alliance for Democracy and Secularism (PADS)
Benjamin Dsouza
Binu Mathew, Editor, Countercurrents. Org
Brinelle D'souza, School of Social Work, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai
Buta Singh, freelance journalist/activist, Punjab
Chayanika Shah, Queer Feminist Activist, Researcher and Teacher, Mumbai.
Chris Fernandes
Cletus Zuzarte, Asst. Professor, Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai
D. K. Rathod , Gandhinagar , Gujarat
Devika Nair
Dinesh Abrol, Professor TRCSS, JNU
Divya Bhatt, filmmaker, Mumbai
Divya Dwivedi, IIT BOMBAY
Dolphy D'souza, Convenor, Police Reforms Watch, Mumbai
Dr Mohammad Arif, Varanasi
Dr Rina Mukherji, Pune
Dr Shilowbhadra Banerjee
Dr. Anant Phadke, Pune
Dr. Aruna Gnanadason, Chennai
Dr. B.Karthik Navayan, Advocate, Hyderabad
Dr. Hazel Dlima (former principal, College of Social Work, Nirmala Nieketan)
Dr. K.N. Ajoykumar, Kerala
Dr. N.Ashok
Dr. Praveen Kumar Prabhakar. Delhi.
Dr. Pyara Lal Garg, Chandigarh
Dr. S.V. Nadkarni, Ex. Dean L.T.M. Med. College, Mumbai,
Dr Mira Shiva
Dr. Saif Mahmood
Dr. Sayed Maqsood Ali
Dr. V.P. Sundarsingh, Rtd. professor,
Dr. Anita Patil-Deshmukh
Dr.N.Ashok
Dr.Prakash Louis
Dr.Syed Yaseen Hashmi
Elvina Gonsalves
Faiz, Mangalore, Karnataka
Farah Naqvi, Writer & Activist, Delhi
Faraz Ahmad, Freelance journalist.
Fr Cedric Prakash SJ , Human Rights Activist
Furqan Sharief
Gabriele Dietrich
Gauhar Raza, former chief scientist, poet, filmmaker
Geeta Balakrishnan
Geetha Surathkal
Ghanshyam
Gokul Dalit, Varanasi
Gopal Gupta
Greg Pereira
Gulnar Khan
Harish Pujari



Harnam Singh
Hasina Khan, Bebaak collective, Mumbai
Henri Tiphagne, National Working Secretary HRDA – India
Hridyanand Sharma, Kushinagar
Humra Quraishi
Iftikhar Khan
Imtiaz Ahmed
Irfan Engineer
J. Bavani Rajan
Jagdish Patel
Jaipal Singh
Janet Fernandes, Profession- Student Social Worker, Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai
Javed Malick.
Jay Patel, MSU, Baroda
Jean Saldanha
Jitendra, Research scientist, Mumbai
Joseph Prabhakar Dayam
Julio Ribeiro, former IPS officer
Jyoti Mallik, Secretary, NFIW, Vice President, IPTA, GHATSHILA
K Venkata Subrahmanyam, Chennai.
K. P Sasi, filmmaker
Kamayani Bali Mahabal, Mumbai
Kamlesh Kumar, Sonbhadra
Karen Sherman, Mumbai
Keshav Sharan, Varanasi
Khalida Parveen
KP Jayasankar
Krishan Takhar, teacher
LABIA - A Queer Feminist LBT Collective, Mumbai.
Lakhan Musafir
Lakshmi Menon
Lalita Ramdas, Alibag
Lara Jesani, Advocate, Bombay High Court, and Member, PUCL, Maharashtra
Lata Singh
Mabel Pinto
Malih Khan, Secretary, Janwadi lekhak Sangh, Ranchi
Mamta Jaitly
Manju Kulapuram, Social Activist
Manzoor Khan
Mary Fernandez
Maya Valecha
Md Mahfoozul Haque
Meena Menon, journalist Mumbai
Meraj Siddiqui, Dist. President, A.P.C.R
Mohammad Aslam Ghazi, President A P C R Maharashtra
Mohammad Zaid Shaikh
Mohammed Ataul Haque, Mumbai
Mohd Jawahir
Mona Ambegaonkar
Mubin Ansari
Mujeeb Khan
Musharraf Ali
Mushtaque Ahmed
Naga Raju
Nand Kashyap
Nand Kumar , Bilaspur , Chattisgarh
Nandini Manjrekar, Mumbai.
Nandita Gandhi, Mumbai
Nasiruddin Haider Khan, Journalist



Nasreen Fazalbhoy
Nathmal Sharma, General Secretary, PWA Chhattisgarh
Naved Salam
Nazeerahmed Srs
Neeraj Malick
Neeta Hardikar
Nidhin Cyril
Nikhat Fatima, Activist, Hyderabad
Nisha Biswas
Norbert Mendonca
Padmanabhan VT
Persis Ginwalla, Ahmedabad
PK Venugopalan, Thiruvananthapuram
Praveer Peter, Jharkhand
Prof Avatthi Ramaiah
Prof K B Garg, Jaipur
Prof Lakshmi Lingam
Prof Lakshmi Lingam.
Prof Pritam Singh, Oxford School of Global and Area Studies, University of Oxford
Prof RK Mandal, Varanasi
Prof. Geeta Balakrishnan, Retired Principal, College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan
Prof. M. C. Dwivedi
Prof. Ramaiha, TISS
Prof. Sivaprasad. V, Kerala
Pyoli Swatija
R Srivatsan, Independent researcher, Hyderabad
Radha Holla Bhar
Rajat Tuli
Rajendra Sathe, Association for Protection of Civil Rights, Pune
Rajesh Kumar Shrivastava, Bhilai
Rajneesh Sahil, Indian Peoples Theatre Association (IPTA), Delhi
Rakesh Kumar, General Secretary, Indian People's Theatre Association
Ram Janam, Sonbhadra
Ram Kishor Chauhan, Deoria
Ram Sagar Sinh Parihar, general secretary Progressive Writers Association, Gujarat
Ramesh Patel
Ramji Yadav, Varanasi
Ranapratap, story writer, editor-Kathantar
Ranjeet Verma
Ranu Jain, academician, Mumbai
Ranu Jain, TISS
Reggie Gomes
Ridhima Sharma, Research Scholar, Jawaharlal Nehru University
Rithik
Rohit Samuel Shah, Doctoral candidate, IIT Bombay
Roopashri Sinha, Independent Researcher
Runu Chakraborty
S Mahfooz
S.Q. Masood, Hyderabad
Sachin Shrivastava, Journalist and activist, Bhopal
Sadakath Mijar
Sadhna Arya, DU
Sami Uddin
Sandeep Pandey
Sandhya Gokhale, Forum Against Oppression of Women, Mumbai
Santosh Kumar, Varanasi
Sarojini N, New Delhi