



Press Release

After receiving information about alleged rape, molestation on women and physical torture inflicted upon aged and minors by the Joint Force and local Police accompanied by the CPI (M) Harmads at Sonamukhi village under Aguiboni- Gram Panchayet and Jhargram police station, a fact finding team of 4 activists from MASUM visited the place on 15th July 2010.

The fact finding team was assisted by local youths and few political activists having no relation to 'Maoist' of the said area.

Sonamukhi, a village under Jhargram police station is situated at about 14 kilometers from Sub Division Head Quarter- Jhargram. The overwhelming majority of the 50 odd households are belong to Mahato community; an OBC according to schedule. The most of the villagers are marginalized peasants or labour.

To reach Sonamukhi village the fact finding team drove down about 10 kilometers of mud road with pebbles (Moram) from Jhargram- Lodhasuli concrete road.

According to the gathered facts, on the fateful date; 30th June at about 5 am nearly 300 Joint Force personnel and local police surrounded the village from three sides. The village is surrounded three sides by forest and bushes and one side opens at agrarian lands and entry road. The raiding force was stationed at the surrounding bushes and forest on that day. They reached the place with umpteen numbers of jeeps and bigger pick up vans. According to the eye witnesses most of the raiding party was wearing camouflage fatigues with black bandana on their heads. It was also reported that the party was accompanied by local CPM activists of Bira- Chandri villages. It was also reported that local CPM leaders namely Prashanta Das and Jitu Saw made several visits to the village before the raid and threatened the women of the village with dire consequences of sexual assaults. On 30th June while the Joint Force raided the village, the male members were not present as usual. According to the villagers they are apprehending raid by joint force and subsequent torture and implication in false cases, thus staying outside is a regular phenomenon. Sonamukhi incident was not in isolation as similar occurrence happened at adjoining villages of Birihandi, Simli, Bankshol, Ghritokham, Didiha and Jarudia in regular intervals. According to villagers that as no male members were present except few aged, it was baseless allegation made by the authority that Maoist took shelter in the village. It was also evident by the fact, no male except two aged got physical injuries; only women were assaulted, molested and even raped.

In Sonamukhi, after entering the village, the raiding party took position in the roof top of one Sambhu Mahato's house and started firing crackers and bullets. The sound made the women panicked and they started running toward the open field. In between the joint force personnel forcibly entered the houses, caught aged and minors, looted the property and belongings and sexually assaulted women as their wish till 1 pm; for nearly 8 hours. The raiding force even dragged couple of aged to the fringe of the village. All of the raiding party was speaking in Hindi.

Thereafter at 3 pm, village youths while came to know the incident and confirmed joint force's departure from their village, assembled and hired one vehicle (Tata- safari) from Kamal Mahato of Lodhasuli by paying Rs. 500 to ferry the injured to Jhargram Sub Divisional Hospital.

The villagers after arranging treatment of the assaulted met the Sub Divisional Officer- Mr. C. Murugan and made a written complaint to him, he assured to visit the place but till date not visited the village. The women made individual complaints to the said SDO on 6th July 2010 but no action has been taken so far.

Statements made by the villagers establish the barbaric assaults on villagers of Sonamukhi and infringement on dignity of the womenfolk.

Mr. Surendra Nath Mahato, aged about 66 years, son of Late Kumed Mahato- While I was entering the bush to attend nature's call at about 5 am, the joint force tied my hand back and started beating me with sticks and chains, they looted my house and snatched a mobile phone of my son-in-law and wristwatch. We have taken to Jhargram Hospital, where I have been admitted for two days, thereafter stayed at my elder brother's house for nearly 10 days. **Apparent injury marks on his chest.** Khagendra Nath Mahato, aged about 70, ex National Volunteer Force personal was brutally assaulted by the Joint Force, they put a plough angle on his shoulder. A young boy, Khokan Mahato, son of Mahendra Mahato was caught by the raiding party and asked about his father's whereabouts and where the firearms have been hidden.

The fact finding team got statements of 7 women in which 4 have been raped and three were molested. For maintaining privacy of those we are not providing their names. All of them were asked identical questions; where is your husband/ men of the village, is there any Muslims living in the village, where are the firearms and information about 'Maoists'. All were raped with force and in presence of their fellow personnel; all were speaking in Hindi and threatened the women by saying that next time you must bare you naked and it will be easier for us to rape you, during this threatening the CPM harmads were present according to the victims.

The women made written complaint to the SDO about rape committed by joint force upon them. In their complaints all of them informed the SDO about their fear to lodge a written complaint to police station.

The then hospital superintendent of Jhargram Hospital; Dr. Hiralal Bisui, who asked few of the victim to lodge complaint to police station, transferred to another hospital and new superintendent taken the charge from Kapgari Block Hospital within a hour notice.

Mr. Bankim Mahato, Pradhan, Aguiboni gram panchayet, met the fact finding team, most interestingly he is elected in CPI (M) nomination, vehemently criticized the offence meted out upon the villagers by the joint force. He said no civilized society can accept this kind of brutality. He also accepted the facts that non-deliverance of the state delivery is the root cause prompting the populace toward the 'Maoist' politics. He made references about BPL, Widow Pension and other such schemes and irregularities regarding the same. He also assured that he will take legal course to make the guilty punished and complaint to SDO by next couple of days. He also stated that his position is not influenced by any force or threats.



pictures of few victims

**Mr. Bankim Mahato,
Pradhan of Aguiboni
Gram Panchayet,
elected from CPI(M)
party**

Kirity Roy
Secretary, MASUM
17th July 2010