

Press Release

# India: On Maoist Ambush in Chattisgarh

Wednesday 29 May 2013, by [NAPM](#) (Date first published: 26 May 2013).

## **Politics of Violence and Counter Violence will only Maim Adivasis**

NAPM Condemns the Ambush by Maoists in Bastar

Increased Militarisation in the Region would be no Solution

New Delhi : Once again in the ongoing politics of offensive and counter offensive between State and Maoists, adivasis have lost their lives. In an ambush on the convoy carrying Congress leaders, Maoists have reportedly killed 27 people and injured several others including senior Congress leader, V C Shukla. On the intervening night of May 17-18 too eight villagers, including three children, and a personnel of elite CRPF Cobra battalion were killed in a gun-battle near Edasmeta village in southern Chhattisgarh too. Adivasis caught in the armed conflict have been the worst victim of this war of control over resources, territory and sovereignty. That this happened during the Parivartan Yatra, a programme of the Congress Party to reach out to the people, is indeed unfortunate.

National Alliance of People's Movements condemns this ambush leading to loss of precious lives. Life of those in power and leadership are important and so are the lives of common adivasis who are being tortured, jailed and killed by Security forces and Maoists alike. In the ongoing conflict both claim to represent the interests and work for Adivasis but their stance and means has only alienated them and perpetrated injustice on them. Their rights have often been violated resulting in large number of adivasis in jail on false trumped up charges. In the same Durma valley where the attack by Maoists have killed Congress leaders, state administration violated all the existing laws and procedures to facilitate land grab for Tata Steel.

Salwa Judum, an armed Sena of the young and adolescents worsened the scenario. It has been termed as illegal and directed to be disbanded by Supreme Court, but State government responded by making them part of the regular police. Even, as Salwa Judum burnt houses, raped women, maimed and killed adivasis, the State supported it and failed to provide justice to adivasis and continued to brand them as Maoists and their supporters. A democratically elected government in Chattisgarh or at the Centre can't use the dictum of 'you are with us or against us'. Its allegiance is to the rule of law and its duty is to protect the rights of its citizens.

Even while, politicians across the political spectrum are terming this as an attack on democracy, let us not forget that every time an adivasi is jailed, killed, their houses burnt, women raped and their schools occupied to facilitate resource grab or termed as collateral damage in the 'Operation Green Hunt', democracy is attacked and the faith of citizens in the State's ability to uphold justice and rule of law, shaken. Violence on both sides is condemnable and should be avoided forever.

We fear that this latest ambush will now be used by the state to justify further militarisation in the region and make lives of Adivasis more difficult. There is an urgent need for political intervention and dialogue. The guns of State or Maoists, will not solve the problem. Politics of violence and

counter violence will only make lives of adivasis and others in the region more difficult, which will ultimately have an impact on the democratic norms and freedom of citizens elsewhere in the country, as seen in shrinking spaces for non-violent, democratic movements and arrest of activists. Soni Sori, Lingaram Kodopi and many others are braving brutality as a result of the war promoted by the state and Maoists, both. Mahendra Karma, openly supported Salwa Judum, a violent outfit and the same violence has killed him. This is tragic, yet a telling fact.

The swiftness with which the centre has promised all help in this regard and dispatched a large number of security forces, if the same urgency was shown for providing justice to the victims of Salwa Judum in all these years, Indian state would have won a bigger political battle by now. Awards, compensation and martyrdom will be bestowed on those killed by Maoists but Adivasis victims of this collateral damage and those languishing in jail need justice too. There is an urgent need to address that otherwise situation will only deteriorate. We demand that political dialogue in all sincerity be initiated to arrive at a political solution rather than increased militarisation.

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