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April 15, 2015

Congressman Chris Smith
Chairman, Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights &
International Operations
2373 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
Via Fax: (202) 225-7768

Dear Congressman Smith,

We have received troubling allegations that the Government of India is illegally detaining and abusing U.S. citizen Ravinderjeet Singh in retaliation for his father's hunger strike.

Context

Ravinderjeet Singh's father, Surat Singh, a U.S. permanent resident, traveled from the U.S. to Punjab, India in November 2014. In January 2015, Surat Singh began a hunger strike from his home in Punjab to protest the Indian government's refusal to release Sikh prisoners who have completed their respective prison sentences. Concerned for his father's welfare, Ravinderjeet Singh left the U.S. on 1/28/15 to visit his father in Punjab.

Punjab Police initially placed Surat Singh under house arrest, and then forcibly removed him on 02/08/15 and confined him at Civil Hospital, Ludhiana (the government hospital in Ludhiana, Punjab). Ravinderjeet and other family members followed the police party to the hospital.

In order to force-feed Surat Singh, in late February, government doctors stitched a feeding tube to Surat Singh's forehead, without anesthesia. Family members tried to obtain medical attention for their father, but doctors failed to treat his wounds.

Threats and false charges

At the hospital, Mukhvinder Bhullar, the ADCP (Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police) threatened Ravinderjeet Singh that if he did not dissuade his father from continuing the hunger strike, they would falsely charge Ravinderjeet with murder and put him away for 15 years.

On 2/26, ADCP Bhullar and about 300 police officials stormed the hospital and abducted Ravinderjeet Singh. Police refused to inform his family members where they were taking him. With the intervention of the U.S. embassy in New Delhi, the family learned police were detaining Ravinderjeet Singh at Ludhiana Jail under penal code sections 107, "apprehension of breach of peace and tranquility of an area" and 151, "arrest to prevent the commission of cognizable offences".

Physical Abuse

Since being detained, Ravinderjeet Singh has had no substantive hearing on the charges in nearly two months, other than four postponements. On the way to his last appearance on 4/13, ASI (Assistant Sub-Inspector) Richard Masih, the police official accompanying Ravinderjeet, took him aside into a holding cell and severely beat him, punching Ravinderjeet Singh on his face, neck, shoulders, and back with a chain wrapped around his fist.

Ravinderjeet Singh is reporting extreme pain and a high fever, and believes he may have fractured bones. Despite interventions by his attorney and family, the police have denied him proper medical treatment.

Conditions and Other Abuse

Further, authorities have detained Ravinderjeet Singh in degrading conditions. Jail authorities have confined him with 225 people in a cell meant for 75. They have not provided potable water on a daily basis, and have only allowed him to bathe every three to four days. The police also forced him into a stress position for 18 hours. The police have repeatedly told Ravinderjeet Singh they will release him if he promises to convince his father to end his hunger strike.

Request for Intervention

It is completely unreasonable for the Government of India to prevent U.S. embassy officials from accessing Ravinderjeet Singh in detention for over two months. The U.S. should make clear to Indian authorities that embassy officials need immediate physical access to Ravinderjeet Singh, that he should be allowed immediate medical attention by a doctor of his choosing, and that authorities must end his unlawful treatment. Given India's clear disregard for legal norms and due process in this matter, a diplomatic intervention is necessary to ensure that India refrains from further abuse and illegal treatment of Ravinderjeet Singh and his father Surat Singh.

There is no plausible basis for the Government of India's illegal treatment of Ravinderjeet Singh. He is not wanted for any crime in India or elsewhere, and is being illegally detained under false charges in a manner that does not comport with minimum notions of due process. Until Ravinderjeet Singh is exonerated of all charges, he is at risk of continuing abuse. The Government of India's treatment of Ravinderjeet Singh puts all U.S. citizens at risk of illegal and arbitrary detention and additional human rights violations in India.

We have received this information directly from Ravinderjeet Singh's U.S. citizen family members who have met him repeatedly in detention in India. We write this letter as their U.S. counsel. Please do not hesitate to contact us for further information.

About

Ensaaf is the leading human rights NGO working to end impunity and achieve justice for gross human rights violations in India, with a special focus on Punjab. Ensaaf documents abuses, brings perpetrators to account, and organizes survivors to advocate for their rights.

Sincerely,



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