

7 September 2017

## **India: Prominent human rights journalist Gauri Lankesh shot dead**

On 5 September 2017, human rights defender and writer **Gauri Lankesh** was fatally shot by unidentified assailants in front of her home in Bangalore, in southern India.

[Gauri Lankesh](#) was a human rights defender and the editor of the weekly local magazine *Lankesh Patrike*. A fierce defender of freedom of expression in India, she was known as a fearless and outspoken journalist advocating against communal violence in the country, as well as against the violent rhetoric of various Hindu nationalist organizations. For this work, she was subjected to regular violent threats, including death threats. Gauri Lankesh also extensively wrote articles criticising the caste system, corruption and conservatism, and often spoke in defence of women's rights and women's safety in the public sphere.

On 5 September 2017 evening, unidentified assailants opened fire on Gauri Lankesh as she was returning home from work in Rajarajeshwari Nagar in West Bangalore, Karnataka state. She was found dead in front of her residence around 8:00pm, having received several bullet wounds to her head and chest. She was subsequently taken to Victoria Hospital in Bangalore for postmortem examination. Police have reportedly launched an investigation into the killing.

Gauri Lankesh had previously received numerous death threats online, mainly from followers of Hindu nationalist organisations. It has also been reported that she was followed by two unidentified men the previous week, however she did not report the incident to the police. On 6 September 2017, several protests were held across India, during which journalists and rights activists reported being increasingly targeted by radical Hindu nationalists.

In November 2016, Gauri Lankesh was convicted for defaming members of the Bharatiya Janata Party – the Hindu nationalist party currently in power - in articles published in her magazine in 2008 and was sentenced to six months in jail along with a Rs. 10,000 (roughly 130 euro) fine. The human rights defender was later granted bail and was in the process of appealing the verdict.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the killing of human rights defender Gauri Lankesh, which it believes is solely motivated by her peaceful and legitimate work for human rights in India, and calls on the Indian authorities to ensure that the culprits are brought to justice.

### **Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in India to:**

1. Strongly condemn the killing of Gauri Lankesh;
2. Ensure that the ongoing investigation into the killing of Gauri Lankesh be thorough and impartial, with a view to bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;

3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in India are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.