

11 June 2019

India: Threats against Ram Puniyani

On 6 June 2019, human rights defender and academic **Ram Puniyani** received two separate calls from unidentified individuals who verbally abused him and threatened that he would be in danger if he did not stop his human rights work and leave the country within 15 days.

[Ram Puniyani](#) is a human rights defender and a former professor at the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay (IIT Bombay). He has dedicated the past 20 years of his life to promoting human rights and communal harmony in India, and is a well-known advocate for rationalist thought in the country.

On 6 June 2019, Ram Puniyani received a phone call at 8.30pm from an unidentified caller who demanded that the human rights defender stop his “anti-Hindutva” activities or face consequences. The caller also verbally abused Ram Puniyani before telling him that he had 15 days to leave the country. After five minutes, the human rights defender received another call from an unidentified person who aggressively asked to speak to the “Doctor” (referring to Ram Puniyani), but hung up immediately after the human rights defender replied that he was not there.

On 7 June 2019, Ram Puniyani filed a First Information Report (FIR) at the Powai Police Station regarding the threatening phone calls. Later on, he met with the Joint Commissioner of Police (Law and Order) to discuss potential security measures to be put in place for his protection. The Mumbai Police has also initiated a probe into the case.

On 8 June 2019, Ram Puniyani was granted 24-hour police protection following a meeting he had with Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Sangramsinh Nishandar. The police protection will be in place until the investigation into his case, which is being led by the DCP’s office, is concluded.

This is not the first time that Ram Puniyani has been intimidated by unidentified persons. On 9 March 2019, three people in plain clothes claiming to be police officers visited the human rights defender at his home on the pretext of following up on his application for a passport. After Ram Puniyani told the “officers” that he had made no such application, they proceeded to make some general enquiries about his family as well as his previous affiliation to IIT Bombay before leaving. Ram Puniyani had also filed an FIR at the Powai Police Station about this incident, along with relevant CCTV footage, but no action had been taken by the police to investigate the matter or identify the visitors.

These recent threats against Ram Puniyani come in a context of rising Hindu extremism in India that has led to an increase in attacks against and killings of human rights defenders promoting communal harmony and rationalism in the country. On 5 September 2017, prominent journalist and human rights defender [Gauri Lankesh](#) was killed after receiving threats from Hindu nationalists for speaking out against communalism.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the threats against and intimidation of Ram Puniyani, as they are believed to be directly linked to his peaceful and legitimate human rights work. Front Line Defenders recognises these threats as part of an ongoing attempt to silence advocates of rationalist and secular thought in the country.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in India to:

1. Strongly condemn the threats against and intimidation of Ram Puniyani;

2. Take all necessary measures to combat the trend of growing extremism in the country, and to ensure the protection of human rights defenders who stand up against it;
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.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 6 (b and c): *“Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others: (b) As provided for in human rights and other applicable international instruments, freely to publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms; (c) To study, discuss, form and hold opinions on the observance, both in law and in practice, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and, through these and other appropriate means, to draw public attention to those matters”*, and to Article 12 (2): *“The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration.”*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson

Executive Director