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India: Human rights defender Yambem Laba abducted by an armed group in Manipur

On 11 February 2025, human rights defender **Yambem Laba** was abducted from his home in the State of Manipur by a group of armed men. For over 7 hours following his abduction, there was no information concerning his whereabouts. The human rights defender was subsequently released, after he was forced to apologize for statements criticising militant groups in Manipur and promising not to make any further public appearances or statements. It is believed that the abduction was a reprisal against his public statements regarding the violence in the Manipur and his comments on the political context following the resignation of Chief Minister of Manipur Bhiren Singh, on 9 February 2025.

[Yambem Laba](#) is a senior journalist and a special correspondent with the Statesman, an English language daily newspaper. He is the former acting chairperson of the Manipur Human Rights Commission. The human rights defender has been critical of the government of Manipur's Chief Minister, due to their failure in ceasing the ethnic violence which has impacted the State for over a year and a half.

On 11 February 2025, at around 3:30 a.m., a group of approximately 15-20 unidentified armed men abducted human rights defender Yambem Laba from his home in Uripok Yambem Leikai, Imphal, Manipur. This was following the human rights defender's participation in a television talk show on the evening of 10 February, where he discussed the resignation of Manipur Chief Minister Bhiren Singh. The abduction took place in the early hours of 11 February, when the group entered his home and abducted him at gunpoint. There was no information about Yambem Laba's whereabouts until around 11:00 a.m. India time, when he was released on the condition that he apologised for making statements against militant groups and promised not to make any further television appearances.

Yambem Laba has been targeted several times before by State authorities and non-state armed groups due to his human rights work, being vocal on the negative impacts of government policies and on the ethnic violence ongoing in the State of Manipur. In October 2024, the human rights defender was arrested on false charges as a reprisal for criticising the Bhiren Singh government. Yambem Laba's house has also been attacked several times, including a few days prior to the abduction, when militants fired several rounds at his home and demanded that the human rights defender delete a Facebook post in which he criticised armed groups in Manipur.

Front Line Defenders is extremely concerned for the safety of Yambem Laba, after the 69-year-old human rights defender was held in an undisclosed location for over 7 hours, in retaliation for his legitimate work as a human rights defender. Our concern is heightened by the fact that he was abducted by an armed group who have frequently threatened human rights defenders for criticising their conduct.

Front Line Defenders calls upon the Indian authorities to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the abduction of Yambem Laba with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice.
2. Conduct an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the repeated armed attacks from militants at the home of Yambem Laba, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice.
3. Ensure that human rights defenders in Manipur are protected from reprisals from State and non-state groups and end the persecution and punishment of human rights defenders in the State, including for exercising their right to free expression and peaceful dissent.

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