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India: Smear campaign against human rights defender Teesta Setalvad

Human rights defender **Teesta Setalvad** is being increasingly targeted with smear campaigns in Indian news channels.

On 6 December 2017, Indian news channel Sudarshan News published an online [article](#) calling Teesta Setalvad ‘anti-Hindu’ after the Supreme Court of India decided to allow Teesta Setalvad and her NGO to raise their grievances before appropriate lower courts. These grievances are in relation to the decision of the Gujarat High Court that upheld a magisterial court order for a probe in a post-Godhra riots case, which Teesta Setalvad and her NGO had challenged. The news article falsely accused Teesta Setalvad and her spouse of using money collected for the relief of riot victims for frivolous purposes and her own enjoyment. The article also brands Teesta Setalvad as someone who is dividing society, spreading hate against Hindus, and gaining economic benefits from her actions.

[Teesta Setalvad](#) is a journalist and founder of **Sabrang Trust, Sabrang Communications and Publishing Private Limited (SCPPL) and Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP)**. Sabrang Trust and Sabrang Communications and Publishing Private Limited (SCPPL) were established after the 1992-1993 communal violence in Mumbai, and work to promote conflict resolution and support peace building. CJP was established in April 2002, in the immediate aftermath of the communal violence during the Gujarat riots, to provide legal aid to the survivors of the riots, and has been instrumental in obtaining the 117 convictions against perpetrators of the violence.

Teesta Setalvad and her associates believe that such smear campaigns could easily incite mob violence against her. She has already faced physical attacks and such smear campaigns open the doors for further harassment. This smear campaign comes during an already ongoing course of [judicial harassment](#).

Front Line Defenders condemns the smear campaign against human rights defender Teesta Setalvad, which it considers to be in retaliation to her legitimate and peaceful human rights work. Front Line Defenders expresses its concern for the security of Teesta Setalvad, particularly as the inflammatory allegations against the human rights defender take place in a climate of repression of freedom of expression and in an increasingly dangerous communal situation.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in India to:

1. Condemn the ongoing smear campaign against human rights defender Teesta Setalvad and carry out an investigation into all occurrences;
2. Take measures to ensure that media channels refrain from making statements or declarations stigmatising her legitimate work, and issue an official apology for publicly discrediting and insulting her and her work;
3. Make all necessary efforts to ensure the physical and psychological integrity of Teesta Setalvad;

4. Guarantee in all circumstances that human rights defenders in India are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without undue restrictions, fear of harassment, threats or retaliation.