

## Indigenous Peoples' Un-Freedoms and Our Academic Freedom

### A Call for Solidarity

We, the undersigned, note with deep concern and urgency the escalating drone attacks by security forces on India's Indigenous (Adivasi) people, particularly [the recent bombings of Adivasi areas in Bastar](#). These acts not only violate the Indian Constitution but also infringe upon the fundamental rights and dignity of Adivasi communities. As scholars concerned about indigenous communities, we consider it our responsibility to draw attention to these attacks on Adivasi lives and livelihoods, and advocate for justice for the people whose lives are intertwined with our research and scholarship.

In April 2023, there were reports of yet another [aerial drone bomb attack carried out by security forces](#) in the Bijapur district of Bastar, Chhattisgarh. These attacks represent a disquieting expansion of state-sanctioned terror against the Adivasi population and pose an imminent threat to their lives and existence. It is crucial to recognize that these attacks are not isolated incidents but occur within [the wider context of Adivasi resistance against state-led efforts](#) to displace and dispossess them from their ancestral lands, enabling corporate access to the region's mineral wealth. The use of aerial bombardment against civilians demands immediate attention and action. We express deep concern about the silence within the academic community regarding this critical issue.

The latest drone attack marks the fourth instance of such attacks within a span of three years. Investigations have verified the allegations of aerial attacks. In February 2023, the Coordination of Democratic Rights Organizations (CDRO) Fact-Finding Team [was initially denied access to](#) the villages of Usoor Block in Bijapur to investigate the aerial bombings that occurred on January 11, 2023. However, in March 2023, [the CDRO successfully conducted an inquiry](#), visiting Mettuguda, Bottethong, and Errapalli villages, where evidence and testimonies confirmed multiple drones dropped nine bombs, followed by intense firing from two helicopters. Such compelling evidence leaves little room for doubt regarding the allegations made by the villagers of Bastar. Similar claims of aerial bombings were reported in [2021](#) and [2022](#), further corroborating the distressing reality. Denying access to a reputable rights organization like the CDRO, who subsequently confirmed the allegations, strongly suggests an ongoing aerial war waged by the Indian state in Bastar.

[The testimonies of affected villagers](#) poignantly reflect the trauma and fear inflicted by these attacks, with drones indiscriminately dropping bombs on individuals engaged in their daily routines. This wanton use of force serves as a strategic tool to instill fear and coerce Adivasi communities into abandoning their villages, effectively facilitating the takeover of the region by mining corporations. The [dismissive response of the police](#) to these allegations compounds the injustice.

International laws explicitly prohibit the use of aerial attacks in internal conflicts or areas inhabited by civilians. However, the Indian state appears to be gearing up towards an all-encompassing war against the Adivasi populace, relentlessly supporting the plundering of rich mineral resources in the region by both Indian and multinational corporations and conglomerates. The latest drone attack must be contextualized within [Operation SAMADHAN-Prahar](#), an ongoing military operation initiated in 2017 as an extension of [Operation Green Hunt](#) explicitly designed to suppress the democratic resistance of the Adivasi people against corporate exploitation. These operations clearly involve procuring drones and weapons, establishing numerous paramilitary camps, and effectively

transforming security forces into private militias for corporations, despite the [Supreme Court of India declaring Salwa Judum](#), a government-funded vigilante organization, as unlawful. In other words, an undeclared civil war is being waged upon the people to facilitate resource exploitation in the interest of capital.

These attacks also flagrantly violate not only the rights of the Adivasis but also contravene the Indian Constitution. Article 14 guarantees the right to equality before the law, which is severely compromised by the targeted nature of these attacks. Article 21 safeguards the right to life and personal liberty, undermined by the use of force and the creation of a climate of fear. Article 19 protects freedom of speech, expression, and assembly, all of which are suppressed by silencing Adivasi voices and dissent. Moreover, the erosion of constitutional safeguards intended to protect Adivasis further exacerbates their vulnerability to state-sanctioned attacks. Special provisions designed to prevent displacement have been systematically undermined, leaving these communities defenseless. The diminishing authority of Tribal Advisory Councils, responsible for ensuring Adivasi participation in decision-making processes, curtails their agency and perpetuates the violation of their rights and traditional practices.

The resounding silence of the opposition, judiciary, media, and the larger citizenry of India in response to these drone attacks and paramilitary camps is a stark mockery of democracy. Academic research has contributed to the evidence that the fundamental conflict in the central Indian forests centers around the Adivasis' unwavering defense of their ancestral lands against the encroachment of powerful corporate entities seeking valuable mineral resources. Academic work has also paid due recognition to the dire consequences of displacement and dispossession, which the Adivasis have bravely chosen to resist despite becoming primary targets of violence and human rights violations, exacerbating their persistent marginalization and pre-existing socio-economic disparities perpetuated by a negligent state.

As academics, we recognize our social responsibility to use our academic freedom to unequivocally condemn these attacks and ardently advocate for the restoration and fortification of constitutional safeguards. It is imperative that we utilize our academic platforms, expertise, and influence to raise awareness of these violations, and demand immediate action to safeguard the rights and lives of Adivasi communities.

We commend [Member of the European Parliament, Marisa Matias, for raising the issue](#) in the European Parliament and asking, “How is the Commission, and specifically DG ECHO [Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations], supporting the victims of aerial bombing and the indigenous environmental defenders who are suffering persecution in India?” This question was asked shortly after [a statement on the bombings](#) was released by [InSAF India](#), [London Mining Network](#) and [India Labour Solidarity UK](#), a few days after the fourth attack. [The EU has acknowledged that](#) “Due to access restrictions imposed for security reasons by the Government of India in Bijapur district, no humanitarian or human rights organizations are allowed to operate in these regions.” It is crucial to question the security reasons behind these access restrictions, as they significantly impact our academic freedom to work in these areas.

We strongly believe that it is our responsibility to amplify the voices of the Adivasis and to stand in unwavering solidarity with them. We pledge our support to their fight for self-determination and a more just and equitable India, where the rights and dignity of all individuals are upheld.