



Press Release

People's Tribunal on the Atrocities Committed against Minorities in the Name of Fighting Terrorism

Hyderabad, August 24, 2008: A three-day People's Tribunal concluded here today after recording testimonies of over 40 victims who have been arrested, harassed and tortured by police and State security agencies in violation of standard legal procedures in the name of fighting terror.

This fight against terrorism, victims emphasized, has veered more around witch hunting of Muslims rather than curbing terrorism, thus robbing people of their liberty and freedom and making them more insecure than ever before. The real culprits, they said, often roam freely whereas the poor and gullible Muslims are picked up and thrown into jails at whims and fancies of the powers that be.

Victims after victims, who have undergone harassment and torture without any evidence permissible in the court of law against them, deposed before the tribunal -- comprising country's eminent personalities including former judges, lawyers and renowned social activists -- and narrated their tales of woes to the shock and anguish of hundreds of audience.

The security-centric State is empowering itself ever more while robbing citizens of freedom and security. The underlying theme emerged that invariably, only people from one community are arrested; only organisations of one sort are blamed and motives too similar are rattled most of the times. The State agencies responsible for such crimes exercise incredible impunity and are never questioned.

The deponents comprised primarily those who were arrested by the police on various charges of acts of terrorist violence and related

crimes, but were later let off due to lack of evidence. Those who are accused of such crimes and are in jails were represented by their close relatives. Invariably, all those who deposed, belonged to Muslim community. In addition to verbal testimonies, some of the deponents also submitted copies of documents pertaining to the cases.

After hearing them carefully, the jury issued its interim report emphasizing that a large number of innocent young Muslims have been or are being victimized by the police on charges of terrorism in gross violation of law. The People's Tribunal showed that police, intelligence agencies and even judiciary are constantly compromising civil liberties and constitutional rights all over India. Innocent people are being arrested, illegally detained, tortured and forced to confess complicity in terrorist acts with which they have no connection whatsoever. It seems that the Indian state has become an apparatus that willfully ignores the basic human rights of minorities in the country.

It would also appear from the testimonies, that many times the police rushed to the press immediately after nabbing some person and dole out the stories of their success and relate the progress of the investigations. The media without any means or wherewithal to check the stories and racing against deadlines reproduced this police version ad verbatim. The result of this was that the public would often get the impression and assume that the culprits and even the mastermind of an act of terrorist violence had been arrested. They would thereby reach the conclusion that they were safe from further acts of violence. This myth would only be shattered after another fresh bout of terrorist act.

The direct fallout of this high voltage publicity, it would seem from the testimonies, is that the accused would often times fail to get proper legal support. At least two lawyers appeared before the tribunal narrating their tales of woe after they took up the case of persons who were accused of acts of terrorism by the police. The lawyers told the jury that at the local bar association passed resolutions that no one from the local bar would represent the accused and neither would any one from outside come and do the same. These two lawyers who defied the ban were beaten up.

It is the collective responsibility of society, the tribunal emphasized at the end of three days, to ensure that the merchants of terror are punished but at the same time society has to take care that deep rooted prejudices do not develop against certain sections - so much so that these sections start wondering whether they are part of this society at all or not.