STRONGLY CONDEMN THE ARRESTS OF CRPP PUBLIC RELATIONS SECRETARY RONA WILSON, ADVOCATE SURENDRRA GADLING (EXECUTIVE MEMBER CRPP AND GENERAL SECRETARY IAPL), SUDHIR DHAWALE, PROF. SOMA SEN AND MAHESH RAUT BY PUNE POLICE BY FRAMING THEM UNDER UAPA!

Today, in the early morning hours, the Pune Police arrested CRPP Public Relations Secretary Rona Wilson, Advocate Surendra Gadling (CRPP AND IAPL), Prof Soma Sen (Nagpur University), Sudhir Dhawale (Dalit activist, Republican Panthers) and Mahesh Raut (anti-displacement activist) by falsely framing them under UAPA after alleging relation to the violence that ensued after the bi-centenary celebrations of the battle of Bhima-Koregaon on 31 Decemeber 2018 and the subsequent bandh. Following close on the heels of arbitrary search operations conducted by the Pune police on 17 April 2018 at the residences of these activists in Maharashtra and Delhi, the present arrests are clearly a deliberate attempt to unleash terror upon activists and lawyers who have been raising their voices against the anti-people policies of the present BJP led NDA government. CRPP condemns all the five arrests in the strongest words and demands their immediate and unconditional release.

Sticking to its script enacted on 17th April while conducting so called 'search operations' at the residences of the above activists, the Pune Police arrested the above activists around 6 am in the morning from Maharashtra and Delhi. As per the Maharashtra police, the arrests have been made under Vishrambaug PS FIR no. 4 of 2018 dated 8th January 2018 under Sections 153(A), 505(1)(B), 117, 120(B), 34 IPC and, now, 13, 16, 17, 18, 18(B), 20, 38, 39, 40 of Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 2008. Rona Wilson was arrested early in the morning and produced at Patiala House Court which sanctioned his transit remand upon the appeal of the Pune Police. The FIR under the pretext of which the arrests were made is registered against Sudhir and members of Kabir Kala Manch to which the names of Rona Wilson and Surendra Gadling were later added after court conceded to the prosecution's appeal. However, the new arrests of Professor Soma Sen and Mahesh Raut whose names were never mentioned in the court papers and were just added by the police today, reveal the desperation of the state to somehow frame a case by arbitrarily associating names of peoples' activists all the way from Maharashtra to Delhi to construe their cock and bull narrative of supposed Maoists plotting the violence that ensued after the Edgar Parishad conference in Bhima Koregaon after 31st December!

On 31st December 2017, an Elgar Parishad was organised to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the battle of Bhima-Koregaon which was attended by thousands who gathered to raised their voice against the forces of Bramanical Hindutva Fascism. On the following day, that is, 1st January 2018, a mob carrying saffron flags instigated by Sambhaji Bhide and Milind Ekbote attacked the masses and activists who had gathered for the commemoration. It should be noted that instead of taking timely action against those who incited and perpetrated violence that ensued after the Elgar Parishad, the state machinery has chosen to devote its time and attention to target and arrest activists and lawyers under the draconian UAPA for speaking against the anti-people policies of the government and the repeal of UAPA citing its use to incarcerate thousands of innocent youths under false cases without bail by the Hindutva state machinery. Both the main forces behind the pre-meditated violence on 1st January 2018, Sambhaji Bhide and Milind Ekbote, are right wing activists closely connected with the ruling BJP and the Sangh Parivar. The police forces have failed to arrest Sambhaji Bhide in connection with this case. Rather, they seem interested in conjuring up an elaborate tale of how the songs of peoples’ resistance sung by activists at the commemoration on 31st December were deliberately intended to incite violence! Allegedly under the same pretext of investigating
the Bhima Koregaon incident, a team of Pune police led by Deputy Commissioner of Police Pravin Munde and investigating officer, Shivaji Pawar searched the residence of Rona Wilson in Delhi and Advocate Surendra Gadling in Nagpur in April.

Wilson has been an activist for several years, advocating for the cause of political prisoners all over India. As Public Relations Secretary of the Committee for the Release of Political Prisoners, he has been at the forefront of organising numerous conventions against the unconstitutional nature of draconian laws like UAPA, AFSPA etc. and against the arbitrary use of death penalty, specifically against Muslims and Dalit minorities. He is an active voice in the campaign for the release of political prisoners condemning the anti-people ploys of the state machinery for arbitrarily persecuting minorities and marginalised sections. CRPP member and Advocate Surendra Gadling has been fighting the cases of many innocent people who have been framed under UAPA and was instrumental in the acquittals of many including Sudhir Dhawale. He has also been representing Delhi University Professor, G N Saibaba and others who were punished with life sentence last year under UAPA by the Nagpur Sessions Court. Professor Soma Sen, Sudhir Dhawale and Mahesh Raut are active voices of resistance in solidarity with people movements' across the country against the tightening tentacles of Hindutva Fascism.

That these arrests are happening at a time when voices of Dalit resistance are transforming into an avalanche of resistance against the anti-people policies of the state indicates the deliberate attempt by the powers that be to stifle all voices of protest. Moreover, it exposes the brazen vengeance of the state against Dalit upsurge organising against the unbridled loot and plunder of resources by imperialist capital aided by the forces of Hindutva Fascism. By targeting activists and peoples lawyers, the state is blatantly trying to snuff out even voices of defense from political prisoners. It must be understood that violence that ensued in Bhima Koregaon is being used as an alibi by the ruling classes to browbeat activists and lawyers who have been fighting for the people into silence. These pre-meditated raids reflect the desperation of the increasingly police state and its growing tendency within the executive to frame activists and lawyers under false charges and keep them in confinement under prolonged incarceration.

It must also be highlighted that this arbitrary arrest has come at a time when CRPP has been able to gather public opinion against the conviction of Prof. GN Saibaba, Hem Mishra, Prashant Rahi, Vijay Tirk, Mahesh Tirk and Pandu Narote. The Gadchiroli Sessions Court, in its 827 page judgment, inadvertently exposes the workings of a national security state which uses the instrument of law to thwart dissent. It is not a coincidence that these simultaneous raids and arrests are happening after the state ordered continuous firing by para military at Chaibasa village in Jharkhand in March in the name of fighting Maoists followed by the dastardly fake encounter of more than 40 adivasis and Maoists in Gadchiroli in April this year. As the drama of yet another parliamentary election is due to unfold in May 2019, the BJP led NDA government will unabashedly expose its violent fangs of fascism to suppress and polarise the united voices of people's resistance emerging from all corners of the subcontinent, from Kashmir to Tuticorin in Tamil Nadu, by directly waging war on the oppressed people in the so called frontier regions and hinterlands and at the same time targeting and incarcerating activists and voices of dissent from urban areas.

The Committee for Release of Political Prisoners strongly condemns the arrests of Rona Wilson and other activists from Maharashtra which is nothing but a tactic to intimidate activists from mobilising people and raising voice against the violence perpetrated by the state.

In protest,
SAR GEELANI ( President)
AMIT BHATTACHARYYA (Secretary General)
SUJATO BHADRA (Vice President)
SUKHENDU BHATTACHARYE (Vice President)
MN RAVUNNI (Vice President)
P. KOYA (Vice President)
MALEM (Vice President)
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