

## Prisoner of Conscience Kopa Kunjam Should Be Freed Immediately and Unconditionally

**Summary: Human rights and development worker Kopa Kunjam has languished in jail in Chhattisgarh for more than 18 months. The charges against him are baseless; the state has not been able to produce any credible evidence. We believe his incarceration is politically motivated.**

The Government of Chhattisgarh should immediately release Kopa Kunjam, who is a human rights and development worker with the Vanvasi Chetna Ashram (VCA), a Gandhian organization based in Dantewada. He was arrested on December 10, 2009 on charges of murdering Salwa Judum [13] leader Punem Hunga. Mr. Kunjam has been imprisoned since then, has faced physical abuse after his arrest and no credible evidence has been produced by the prosecution so far. Amnesty International has appealed for his release immediately[12]. His application for bail has been rejected by the trial court and the Chhattisgarh High Court and is now pending before the Supreme Court.

Kopa Kunjam is an adivasi activist from Dantewada and has been involved in campaigns around local issues such as against alcoholism for a long time. After joining VCA in 1996, he had worked on watershed, public health, and total sanitation programs. He worked to [rehabilitate more than 30 villages](#) [2] that had been [abandoned following attacks by Salwa Judum and security forces](#) [3]. This was done after the Govt. of Chhattisgarh failed to carry out [the Supreme Court orders](#) [4] in 2008 to disband the Salwa Judum and rehabilitate the people displaced by its violence.

Kopa had documented and exposed the following cases of human rights abuses by the security forces:

- [Samsetti rapes](#): Four women belonging to the Samsetti village in the Dantewada district, along with 2 others, were gang raped by Special Police Officers (SPOs) in 2006. Kopa helped the women file court complaints in 2009. [5]
- [Matwada massacres](#): Three adivasi men were killed by Salwa Judum on March 18, 2008, in front of a police station and close to a CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force) camp. With VCA, Kopa helped the widows file a petition in the High Court. [3],[ 6]
- [Singaram massacres](#) On January 8, 2009, 19 people were killed in the village of Singaram. Kopa helped the relatives of the victims file a petition in the High Court. [7],[11]
- [Massacres at Gachanpalli and Gompad](#) Six villagers were killed by security forces on September 17, 2009 in the Gachanpalli village and 11 more were killed in the nearby Gompad village on October 1, 2009. As part of VCA, Kopa was involved in investigating the killings and filing a petition in the Supreme Court in November, 2009, [Writ petition (Civil) 103, 2009]. On January 6, 2010, 12 petitioners went missing only to be produced in court on Feb15, 2010. [8]

The police and SPOs tried to silence Kopa [by threats, bribes and beatings](#) [9],[10]. When these tactics failed to work, he was arrested under fabricated charges.

Kopa is one of the many social workers who have helped expose the systematic human rights abuses in Chhattisgarh by the state backed Salwa Judum and the security forces. The Supreme Court [in its July 5th, 2011 judgement](#) [1] has reprimanded the Government of Chhattisgarh for arming civilians and victimizing human rights defenders and social workers. Binayak Sen, Sukhnath Oyame, Kartam Joga, Ajay TG are only some of people who have been jailed on false charges for raising their voices against the state.

The prosecution has been unable to produce any evidence to support the charges. The 2 prime

prosecution witnesses have refused to corroborate police accusations against Kopa while other witnesses have failed to appear in court.

We demand:

1. An immediate release of Kopa Kunjam and other human rights defenders .
2. An independent inquiry into the circumstances leading to the detention of Kopa on false charges and fabricated evidence and that responsible officials be held accountable.
3. That the state ensure democratic space for peaceful dissent.

- [1] [Judgement by Supreme Court of India disbanding Salwa Judum, July 5th, 2011](#)
- [2] [Open Letter by Himanshu Kumar, \*Tehelka\*, Dec 11, 2011](#)
- [3] [Chhattisgarh Enquiry Report by Natn'l Human Rights Commission, 2008](#)
- [4] [Supreme Court order vindicates PUCL's stand on Salwa Judum, Sept 2008](#)
- [5] [The Tribal 'Ruchikas' of Dantewada by Javed Iqbal, \*New Indian Express\*, Jan 14, 2010](#)
- [6] [Complaint Letter to DGP Vishwaranjan on Matwada Massacre](#)
- [7] [The Jungle Justice Of The Trigger Happy, \*Tehelka\*, Feb 07, 2009](#)
- [8] [Chhattisgarh police detained 'encounter' petitioners, say villagers, \*The Hindu\*, March 19, 2010](#)
- [9] [Kopa's letter to the Superintendent of Police complaining physical abuse by SPOs, Aug 4, 2009](#)
- [10] [Life Behind The Iron Curtain, \*Tehelka\*, Jan 16, 2010](#)
- [11] [Video: Kopa on site where the victims of Singaram were buried](#)
- [12] [Amnesty International's statement asking for Kopa's release, Dec 23, 2009](#)
- [13] A State backed vigilante force that was disbanded by the Supreme Court on July 5th, 2011
- [14] Original documents & translations available on [www.otherindia.org](http://www.otherindia.org)