



CURIA GENERALIZIA DELLA COMPAGNIA DI GESÙ
Segretariato per la Giustizia Sociale e l'Ecologia (SJES)



PRESS RELEASE

The Society of Jesus demands the immediate release of Fr. Stan Swamy SJ, 83 years old, imprisoned in India for defending the rights of indigenous people

Jesuits are mobilizing all over the world to demand Fr. Stan Swamy's release.

Human rights defender Fr Stan Swamy SJ has been taken into custody by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) of India for alleged Maoist links. Fr Stan, who is 83 years old and in poor health, has worked untiringly for the marginalized, downtrodden, and other vulnerable communities, especially the indigenous people in Jharkhand, India, for five decades.

"We are shocked and dismayed to know that Fr Stan Swamy SJ, who has been working all his life for the uplift of the downtrodden and other vulnerable people, has been taken into custody by the NIA," said Fr George Pattery SJ, President of the Jesuit Conference of South Asia, in an open letter dated 9 October, demanding the immediate release of Fr Stan.

The Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat of the Society of Jesus in Rome has also expressed solidarity in a [public statement](#). As the Secretary Fr. Xavier Jeyaraj said: *"We, as Jesuits involved in works of education, caring and defending the rights of the poor and the vulnerable all over the world, stand in solidarity with Stan and other human rights defenders in India and strongly condemn the arrest of Fr Stan Swamy, demand immediate release, and request the State to refrain from arbitrary arrests of innocent law abiding citizens."*

In a press release dated October 9, 2020, the Catholic Bishop's Conference of India (CBCI) *"makes a strong appeal to the concerned authorities to immediately release Fr. Stan Swamy and to permit him to go to his residence."*

Fr Stan had been interrogated multiple times for over 15 hours by the NIA at the Jesuit residence in Bagaicha, Ranchi, in July and August. It is alleged that his arrest on 8 October is related to the controversial case of Bhima Koregaon-Elgar Parishad on 31 December 2017, in which organisations serving the Dalits (untouchables) convened an event to commemorate 200th anniversary of the battle of Koregaon Bhima, which was legendary for the Dalits as they prevailed over the dominant Brahmin. Held in Pune, it was attended by around 35,000 people. Taken as a provocation by the Hindu extremist groups, who tried to boycott it, the situation ended with an outbreak of violence that left one person dead and several injured and arrested. Fr. Stan is the last of 16 detainees, including well-known rights defenders lawyers Arun Ferreira and Sudha Bharadwaj and writers Vernon Gonsalvez and Varavara Rao.

Fr. Stan has strongly denied having ever been to Bhima Koregaon, as well as any accusations linking him to Maoist forces and believes that the state is after him because of his dissent with several policies of the government and his struggle for the rights of the *Adivasis*. Father Stan has been working for decades for the land rights of the *Adivasis*, documenting the abuse of power against indigenous youth, falsely accused and imprisoned for defending their rights. He filed a public interest litigation (PIL) in court against the state of Jharkhand on behalf of 3000 imprisoned indigenous people.



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In a [video statement](#) made two days prior to his arrest Fr Stan said: *“What is happening to me is not unique. Many activists, lawyers, writers, journalists, student leaders, poets, intellectuals, and others who stand for the rights of Adivasis, Dalits, and the marginalized and express their dissent to the ruling powers of the country are being targeted and put into jail.”*

The Jesuit Conference of South Asia has called Monday, 12 October, [a National Day of Solidarity](#) with Fr. Stan Swamy. Peaceful demonstrations, meetings of solidarity, candlelight march, prayer, online campaigns will be held across the country and worldwide.

They have also started a [petition](#) for Fr. Stan's release, which has collected more than 41,000 signatures in three days. Jesuits mobilize worldwide support to express their solidarity with Fr. Stan Swamy and to request his immediate release. #StandwithStan #ReleaseStanSwamy #freeStanSwamy.

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