

Campaigners demand government action on epidemic of caste-based sexual violence in Uttar Pradesh

Over 75 human rights organisations sign letter to Uttar Pradesh's Chief Minister over failure to protect Dalit women and girls from caste-based sexual violence.

DELHI, NCT, INDIA, October 3, 2020
/EINPresswire.com/ -- Dear Chief Minister,

We, the undersigned human rights organizations and civil society partners, work to defend the rights of women and girls and ensure justice for victims and survivors of sexual violence.

We are writing to express our serious concern at the rising number of grave incidents of rape and caste-based sexual violence in Uttar Pradesh (U.P.)

over the last few months. The horrific crime of gangrape and physical attack committed in Hathras on 14 September 2020, resulting in the death of a young Dalit woman on 29 September has shaken the conscience of the nation and lead to widespread outrage.

Worryingly, the Hathras gangrape incident is one of many recent atrocities of rape, gangrape and murder committed against Dalit women and girls in U.P., with Lakhimpur Kheri district registering at least six such cases in the last 60 days. Most recently, on 30 September, another 22-year-old Dalit woman was raped and murdered in Balrampur district. There are numerous other cases which demonstrate the epidemic of sexual violence and caste-based atrocities in U.P., where deep-rooted casteism prevails.

2019 data from the National Crimes Records Bureau shows that ten Dalit women are raped every day in India. U.P. has the highest number of cases of violence against women (59,853) as well as the highest number of cases of sexual assault against girls registered under the



Hundreds join street demonstration in Uttar Pradesh to protest over the epidemic of rape and murder of Dalit women and girls

Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act. U.P. also registered the highest number of cases of atrocities against Scheduled Caste persons under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act [SC & ST (PoA) Act], with 11,829 cases.

Despite the serious and brutal nature of these crimes, multiple reports say that U.P. Police have not properly fulfilled their duties and have responded in a careless and discriminatory manner. We would like you to initiate an urgent enquiry into these allegations.



Candlelit vigil in Uttar Pradesh to protest over widespread rape and murder of Dalit women and girls in the State

In the Hathras gangrape case, the family of the victim has alleged that nobody was arrested for ten days after the FIR was filed. The U.P. police have reportedly made claims to the media saying it is not confirmed that the victim was subjected to multiple rapes. This is extremely concerning given the family maintains that police insisted on the forcible cremation of the victim's body at around 3am on the night of 30 September, against the family's wishes and they were not allowed to attend.

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We urge you to do everything in your power to send a strong message that sexual violence will not be tolerated irrespective of which community the victim belongs to.”

Letter signatories

In numerous other cases across U.P., rape survivors and families of victims report struggling to get FIRs registered by the police in rape cases; to get cases additionally registered under the SC & ST (PoA) Act; and to obtain

police protection to ensure their safety from attacks and reprisals by dominant caste community members and associates of the accused.

Sexual violence survivors and victims' families face extreme social and community pressure to compromise cases, particularly where the rape is caste-based and committed by a dominant caste perpetrator. Provision of adequate support services to survivors/victims, including police protection, good quality shelter homes, speedy release of victim's compensation, and counselling and other rehabilitation services would go a long way in shielding survivors/victims and families from pressure to compromise.

The rising number of rape cases in U.P. is also caused by the culture of impunity which is enjoyed by rapists and perpetrators of caste-based atrocities, particularly those from dominant caste communities such as the Thakurs.

Although a Special Investigation Team (SIT) has been set up by you for investigating the Hathras gangrape case, it is not sufficient to only take special measures in a few cases in response to widespread media coverage and public pressure. Systemic changes and reforms are required across U.P.'s entire criminal justice system to ensure speedy justice in all such cases. Police accountability needs to go beyond merely transferring officers who are found to be negligent in handling cases as an appeasement measure. Measures must show zero tolerance for any misconduct to deter similar future behaviour and hold perpetrators fully to account.

We urge the U.P. state government to take the following measures:

- The Hathras gangrape case must be fast-tracked so justice is not delayed or impeded. Speedy trials should take place in all such cases.
- Robust action is required, including the thorough filing of criminal cases under section 4 of the SC & ST (PoA) Act and section 166-A of the Code of Criminal Procedure, and taking disciplinary action against police officers who refuse to register FIRs; tamper with evidence; push survivors or their families to compromise; or in any way obstruct justice in sexual violence cases. Action must go beyond suspending or transferring officers. Systemic reform is needed, including police sensitization and training, and implementation of all recommendations in the 2013 Justice J.S Verma Committee's report regarding police reforms.
- Immediate protection to survivors/victims and their families in sexual violence cases must be provided, including for the family in the Hathras gangrape case. We also urge the U.P. Government to comply with Supreme Court directions and provisions of the Witness Protection Scheme, 2018, including implementing a witness protection scheme in U.P., establishing a Witness Protection Fund, and providing security cover for all victims and witnesses who have received threats or asked for protection during investigation and trial of sexual violence complaints.
- Impunity at all levels must be addressed to send a clear message that sexual violence and accompanying violence meant to silence or intimidate survivors or their families will not be tolerated, irrespective of the class, caste or community the accused belongs to.
- Existing laws on sexual violence must be effectively enforced and implemented and adequate resources allocated to combat sexual violence.
- Compensation, psycho-social support, medical care and other relief and rehabilitation services must be provided to all survivors or victim's families.

We urge you to do everything in your power to send a strong message that sexual violence will not be tolerated irrespective of which community the victim belongs to.

Regards,

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