

District Office
Transport House
46-48 New Road
Dagenham
Essex RM9 6YS

Regional Secretary
Peter Kavanagh



Tel: 020 8596 9966
Fax: 020 8595 7930

LONDON & EASTERN REGION

From Doctors in Unite: The doctors branch of Unite the Union.

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To Whom It May Concern:

We are alarmed to hear reports that India's prison population now stands at nearly half a million and that prisons are extremely overcrowded and unhygienic. With continuing dangerously high levels of Covid-19 in India, the virus will be spreading like wildfire through the prison population - in conditions where social distancing is impossible. Among those locked up are a considerable number of people whose only 'crime' has been to dissent or to take part in non-violent protests. Some of them are elderly, many are in poor health and particularly vulnerable to catching the virus, others have already been infected and reportedly either being denied treatment or only receive it after enormous pressure from their friends and families.

Such prisoners include Anand Teltumbde, Professor Hany Babu, Gautam Navlakha and Father Stan Swamy in Taloja jail, Sudha Bharadwaj and Shoma Sen in Byculla prison Mumbai, Umar Khalid and Glufisha Fatima in Tihar jail in Delhi, Hidme Markham in prison in Chhattisgarh state and Professor G.N.Saibaba in Nagpur prison, in Maharashtra.

There are many, many others, but the underlying principle is the same – no one, least of all those locked up for dissent and exercising their right to protest, should be punished further by exposure to this deadly virus.

The UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (1948, art. 5) INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS (1976, art. 7) states:

“No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”

We believe that the Indian Government is flouting the declaration by continuing to hold any prisoners in the conditions reported above and we believe that political prisoners, incarcerated merely for exercising their right to peaceful dissent must be immediately and unconditionally released.

Dr Jackie Applebee MBBS FRCGP

Chair of Doctors in Unite.

