

## **Back From The Graveyard**

On June 20, the 'International People's Tribunal on Human Rights and Justice in Indian-administered Kashmir' visited the northern district of Kupwara, a heavily militarized zone about 95 km from Srinagar, to conduct its investigations in the area, as part of its ongoing work to be conducted in 2008-2009.

The team composed of Tribunal Conveners Dr Angana Chatterji and Advocate Parvez Imroz, with a Tribunal staff member and camera crew. They first visited a mass grave in Trehgam village and interacted with inhabitants of the area. After which the team reached Regipora around 3pm and stopped at a hotel for lunch. After the team came out of the hotel two persons were sitting on the ladders, one in a blue check shirt and another in a white shirt, introducing themselves as Special Branch Kashmir (SBK) and Counter Intelligence Kashmir (CIK) personnel. They questioned the Tribunal staff members about the purpose of their visit. After responding, Tribunal members proceeded with the fact finding.

The Tribunal team then visited the martyrs' graveyard in Regipora, after which they stopped at a nearby tea stall to speak with local people about the graves. Four persons, including the previous two that introduced themselves as the SBK, CIK personnel again questioned the members of the team: Who are you?, What are you doing here?, How many villages you visited from the morning?, Are you a foreign national? (to Dr Chatterji who is a citizen of India and resident of the US). The team again answered their questions without any argument.

After this episode ended another four persons establishing themselves as SBK and CIK personnel came to the scene. The personnel asked the members, how many foreigners are there in the team and are they carrying passports with them? The personnel again asked, Who is the Lady? What is she? Which are the places you visited from the morning? And whom did you talk and interviewed from the morning?

Three more persons, who were at different locations in the market, and seen making phone calls constantly, again questioned the Tribunal team: 'Did you take any footage and pictures from the places you visited?' The team again answered to their queries. In total, there were 12 intelligence personnel. The questioning by the personnel took around one hour. Then the team proceeded towards Srinagar. While the team rode back, a car started to follow the team. The team detoured from the highway and went to another mass grave in the area.

After the Tribunal team left the last site, they were stopped at Shangargund, Sopore, at around 6:40 pm by three persons in civilian clothing. The personnel ordered the driver of car to get down and took him aside. The driver was asked, 'Which places you visited?' he replied them and then the three persons without proving their identity forcibly boarded the Tribunal car, which was already filled to capacity. These personnel without proving their credentials or offering justification ordered the Tribunal team to Police Station in Sopore. When the members asked for identification, they responded that they would introduce themselves in the police station.

## **POLICE STATION**

At the police station Advocate Imroz, Dr Chatterji, and the camerapersons were asked to give details of their identity, the purpose of their visit of Kupwara, and asked to hand over the tapes which the police alleged contained 'dangerous' and 'objection-able' material. Dr Chatterji and Advocate Imroz stated that the Tribunal, a publicly announced process, ongoing since April 05, 2008, had been undertaking its work peaceably, lawfully, with informed consent of local people and that they had not visited restricted areas, and stated that the police had no lawful reason to demand the seizure of the tapes. At the police station, where the Tribunal members were detained for 16 minutes, the Tribunal team received calls from presspersons and other concerned citizens. After several calls to the senior police persons, the police released the Tribunal team.

After the team left the police station a red coloured Indica car, which came out from the Police Station Sopore, tailed the Tribunal team again up to Sangrama.

In addition, there are Intelligence personnel stationed at Dr Chatterji's hotel. On June 21, she was followed from her hotel by Intelligence department men to the Tribunal's office in Lal Chowk, Srinagar, where about 8 personnel have been stationed the entire day questioning any person that leaves or enters the office.

The Tribunal is gravely concerned that team members are being singled out for intimidation and harassment by the government—Police, intelligence, and other agencies. As well, Dr Chatterji was stopped and intimidated at Immigration office while leaving India for the US where she is a professor of anthropology, in April after announcing the Tribunal, and again on her re-entry in June.

The Tribunal is extremely concerned at the harassment and intimidation directed at the team and how some of its members are surveilled. Such intimidation and harassment makes further dangerous the work of the Tribunal which remains daunting under the best of circumstances. Such interventions stand in the way of the Tribunal carrying out its responsibilities to communities affected by the culture of violence in Kashmir. □□□

*{This is a press release issued by Khurram Pervez, Tribunal Liason}*