

NOTE

One Year in Prison

A Correspondent writes :

On May 13th/14th, 2008 Dr Binayak Sen, an activ-ist with a lifelong commitment to the issues of community health and human rights, has completed his first year of unjust imprisonment at the Raipur Central Jail in Chhattisgarh. Organizations across the globe held events on the evening of May 13th, 2008 to mark one year of his imprisonment.

Dr Sen's life has been focused on providing healthcare to the most marginalized sections of the society. By setting up the unique *Shaheed Hospital*, the community-driven work of *Rupantar* and his broader involvement with *Jan Swasthya Abhiyan*—the Indian circle of the People's Health Movement, Dr Sen has made health-care available to people who have been ignored by government or private systems.

As the State Secretary of People's Union for Civil Liberties of Chhattis-garh and the national Vice President, Dr Sen has uncovered human rights violations by the state and other armed groups. He has highlighted starvation deaths, dysentery epidemics, poor conditions of under-trial prisoners, custodial deaths and extra-judicial killings. Dr Sen has also worked on the issues of right to food, work, health and education. He has been amongst the most vocal opponents of *Salwa Judum*, a private militia movement armed by the Chhattisgarh Government to combat Maoist insurgency—that has contributed to a spiraling increase in violence and displacement of thousands of tribals. Even the Supreme Court of India has issued a strong disapproval of the *Salwa Judum*, citing concerns similar to those raised by Dr Sen.

On May 14th, 2007 Dr Sen was arrested in Raipur under the repressive Chhattisgarsh Special Public Security Act, 2005 (CSPSA) and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 2004 (UAPA) on charges of sedition, conspiracy to wage war against the state and conspiracy to commit other offences. The continuing detention of an activist committed to non-violence and social justice is a mockery of justice itself. He now remains imprisoned for a year without trial or bail, including a cruel spell of solitary confinement.

Dr Sen is victim to an increasing trend of arresting human rights activists in India for challenging state authority. Lachit Bordoloi, a human rights activist from Assam; Prashant Rahi, journalist from Uttarakhand; Govindan Kutty, editor of People's March in Kerala; Praful Jha, a journalist from Chhattisgarh; Vernon Gonsalves, an activist from Nasik; Arun Ferreira, Ashok Reddy, Dhanendra Bhurule, Naresh Bansode, activists from Vidarbha have all been charged under the UAPA and kept under prolonged detention without bail.

The international community has already shown its appreciation by bestowing the Jonathan Mann award for public health and human rights on him. In addition, the UAPA and the CSPSA must be repealed, and the Chattisgarh government should stop its support for *Salwa Judum*. □