

07TH MARCH, 2014**PRESS STATEMENT**

PUCL condemns the move of Meerut Police and UP Government to book 67 Kashmiri students of Swami Vivekanand Subharthi University, Meerut under sedition law, namely Section 124-A, IPC, for allegedly cheering in support of Pakistan during the Asia cup cricket match. The use of the harsh provision of sec. 124A IPC against the students has shocked the nation, for apart from criminalizing a trivial incident, the law invoked carries a sentence of upto life imprisonment. Though the sedition charges were dropped later due to political intervention, they not only go on to show the way in which Kashmiris are treated across the nation but also raise another important issue of the way draconian provisions of law like the anti-sedition law is routinely abused to silence citizens, muzzle free speech, intimidate anyone even remotely questioning government and state policy and brutally ensure that citizens conform to what is considered politically right by the ruling political elite and establishment.

Sec. 124A IPC was made by the British government to crush and silence freedom fighters during the independence struggle and had been famously used against Mahatma Gandhi and Balgangadhar Tilak, both of who were convicted for 6 years under this law.

For the last 100 years, both the colonial British state and independent Indian governments have used anti-sedition laws as a tool of repression to silence anyone from questioning their actions. This draconian law has been invoked earlier against author and activist Arundhati Roy, well known doctor and PUCL National Vice-President Dr. Binayak Sen, journalist Seema Azad and cartoonist Aseem Trivedi.


PUCL strongly believes that Section 124A is an archaic and repressive law which has a '*chilling effect*' on freedom of speech and expression of Indian citizens as enshrined in Article 19 (1)(a) of the Indian Constitution. As long as it is in the law books it will continue to be abused to silence dissent and prevent challenges to ruling interests. Jawaharlal Nehru made a promise to the nation in India's First parliament that sec. 124A IPC is unacceptable and that the law will be repealed. PUCL has been demanding not just the repeal of sec. 124A IPC but also clones of the law in other statutes like the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act.

The Meerut police, have charged the students not only under Sec. 124A, but also u/s 153A IPC (promoting enmity between different communities) and sec. 427 IPC (committing mischief). PUCL strongly condemns the registration of criminal case as unacceptable and unwarranted for the alleged incident is trivial.

Such whimsical, vengeful and capricious abuse of the criminal laws by the police will only result in further alienation of Kashmir youth and not help to build emotional and social bonds with the rest of people in India. It is time that civil society becomes more sensitive to the need to address Kashmiri alienation by making Kashmiris feel welcome and included whenever they visit any city or region of India.

It is therefore that PUCL demands that not just sec. 124A, but the FIR filed against unnamed Kashmiri students be unconditionally withdrawn. PUCL also demands that the suspension of the students by University authorities should also be withdrawn.

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