

20th June, 2019***PUCL Statement Against lodging of FIR against
Lawyers Collective & Sr. Advocate Anand Grover***

People's Union for Civil Liberties is shocked at the lodging of an FIR against the Lawyers Collective, its President and senior lawyer, Anand Grover and other office bearers by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). We condemn this vindictive and utterly unjustified act against this well known human rights and legal aid organization with a long history of fighting for the rights of ordinary people. PUCL deplores this undisguised attempt to intimidate and silence Mr Grover, as well as legal luminary and co-founder of Lawyers Collective, Ms Indira Jaising, and office bearers of the organization.

The lodging of the FIR by the CBI is nothing short of a brazen abuse of the process of law. The FIR follows an investigation into allegations of violation of provisions of the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (FCRA), 2010, launched in 2016. Then, orders for the suspension and cancellation of LC's registration to receive foreign funding were passed by the Ministry of Home Affairs. Lawyers Collective has refuted all the charges against it. Besides, the organization had challenged the cancellation of its FCRA registration in an appeal before the Bombay High Court, which is pending. The complaint registered against the Lawyers Collective, and its key functionaries, Ms. Indra Jaisingh and Anand Grover, constitutes a motivated, vengeful and vituperative act meant to silence not just the Lawyers Collective but also serve as a lesson to all others who dare to challenge the Central Government.

An extremely disturbing aspect of the case against Lawyers Collective is the manner in which it follows so closely on the heels of an extremely dubious PIL filed in the Supreme Court of India by 'Lawyers Voice', a self-styled organization headed by Neeraj, said to be a member of the legal cell of the ruling BJP. Ms Jaising has stood in defence of human rights defenders and was vocal on the procedural irregularities in the recent sexual harassment case in the Supreme Court. On May 8 this year, amidst vociferous protests of prominent lawyers and activists over the failure of due process in the sexual harassment charge against the Chief Justice of India, Ranjan Gogi, the latter heard and issued notice on the PIL, which sought an SIT probe into the 'inaction' of the Central government against the lawyers and their organization.

Seen against this backdrop, the sudden registration of FIR by the CBI strongly indicate a witch-hunt against 2 of the most outspoken and important human rights

defenders in India. Indeed, a major aspect of the case made out against the organization was that its work violated various guidelines of the FCRA regulations including in lobbying work for passage of crucial rights protection legislations! Its important to point out that the Lawyers Collective and its team have taken up important cases throughout the 38 years of their existence. Apart from a range of cases relating to domestic violence, human rights, labour and womens' rights, Lawyers Collective has taken up the important Naz case on rights of the LGBTQ community, the Novartis case, the Sabarimala case, the triple talaq case and the Sohrabuddin case, in which current Home Minister and BJP leader Amit Shah was involved.

Mr. Grover has held an important position as the UN Special Rapporteur on right to health from August 2008 to July 2014. He is currently an acting member of the Global Commission on Drug Policy and is a member of the UNAIDS Reference Group on HIV and Human Rights while Ms. Jaising was part of the team of lawyers for the accused in the ongoing Bhima Koregaon case as well as the case against Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar, where she successfully fought the plea of the CBI to seek his custodial interrogation.

Clearly, the current dispensation finds such voices of conscience, as the Lawyers Collective and its office-bearers have been, as uncomfortable and inconvenient. The case lodged against the organization smacks of vendetta for its exceptional work on securing rights for the marginalized. It is ill-conceived, vindictive, politically motivated and designed to have a chilling effect on all those who raise a voice of dissent.

PUCL demands that the state desist from these continuous attempts to browbeat the senior lawyers, Ms. Indira Jaisingh and Anand Grover, by embroiling them in multiple legal cases and procedures and misusing its powers to order the arrest and detention of all dissenters. PUCL demands that this witch-hunt against lawyers, journalists and human rights defenders cease forthwith.

PUCL demands that the case against the Lawyers Collective be dropped forthwith.

Mr. Ravi Kiran Jain,
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Dr. V. Suresh,
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