

## PRESS STATEMENT

15.12.2025

**Nation-wide lawyers protest the arrests and intimidation of villagers in Odisha, against the illegal acquisition of Schedule V land for Vedanta Pvt. Ltd.'s bauxite mining project**

Led by Odisha lawyers, over 125 lawyers, legal professionals (faculty), and law students nationwide, have signed a petition addressed to the Governor of Odisha, and the DGP of Odisha police, requesting them to urgently perform their constitutional duties to protect Schedule V lands, the citizens therein, control the fearful environment, and uphold the rule of law in the state of Odisha.

Facts in brief - Schedule V land was leased to Vedanta Pvt. Ltd. by the State of Odisha, for the purpose of bauxite mining in the region of Sijimali, in Rayagada and Kalahandi districts. Most recently, the FAC, in its 12th committee meeting held on 02.12.2025 recommended to Odisha government for State level approval of stage 1 clearance to Vedanta's Sijimali bauxite mines for diversion of forest land for an area 708.24 hectares out of the total mining lease area of 1548.786 ha.

There are multiple problems with the entire process of land acquisition for this bauxite mining project. Firstly, the lease was given without prior consultation and consent of the villagers. About half the land is forest land and community managed land, which is governed by the Forest Conservation Act , 1980, Orissa Scheduled Areas Transfer of Immovable Property Regulations 1956, PESA 1996, FRA 2006, etc. The laws require the informed and free consent of residents of these lands before any transfer. Secondly, the company and State in collusion held 10 fake Gram Sabhas in the presence of armed police and company staff, so as to obtain the purported consent of people. Thirdly, land was also diverted to form a land bank controlled by IDCO, for handover to Vedanta. Fourthly, a highly incomplete Environment Impact Assessment Report had been prepared prior to the Gram Sabhas, which undercounted the perennial streams and water sources, and which had been objected to in a series of public hearings.

Furthermore, there has been the constant presence of police and company staff in their villages, over the past two years (2023-25). Meanwhile, villagers have begun to protest the illegal processes of land acquisition. These lands and forests are community lands that the people of the region have been cultivating and protecting since generations. They vigorously objected to the fake gram sabhas, and in September 2024 held their own gram sabhas, wherein they rejected Vedanta's bauxite mining proposal as detrimental to their life and livelihood, and the regional ecology.

In response to the protests, a cascading series of extreme intimidation, harassment, detention, arrest and re-arrests by the local police have plagued the people of the region for the past two years. This has led to an atmosphere of terror and the breakdown of rule of law in the two districts. People are fearful even when visiting the hospital or when attending the haat incase they are randomly arrested. Daily life has become near impossible. Police have been witnessed abducting civilians, and arrestees have spoken about extreme threats and slurs if they should further oppose Vedanta's bauxite mining project. Over 9 leaders from the villages are presently being held in detention, and more are threatened and picked up regularly.

Community Demands:

1. Immediate review of the lease to Vedanta.
2. Stop arrests and a revocation of all FIRs issued against villagers protesting the project.
3. Halt of all works in the area, including land acquisition, until the gram sabhas make voluntary decisions in a fearless environment.
4. Any police deployment be subject to the approval of Gram Sabhas.
5. Inquiry into all officials responsible for harassment, detention and arrests.
6. Prohibit the presence of company staff in villages.

Signed,

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