

PEOPLE'S UNION FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES

Bangalore Chapter

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Repeal AFSPA, Free Irom Sharmila

May 22 –August 18

The draconian act of AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958) has been implemented in North eastern states of India since 1958 and in Jammu and Kashmir since 1991. It was on May 22, 1958, that the AFSPA was promulgated in the north east as an ordinance. This law is more draconian than its predecessor ordinance used by the British to suppress the Quit India Movement. It gave extraordinary powers to members of the armed forces, to arrest without warrant and shoot to kill on the basis of suspicion; and no legal action can be taken up against the armed forces without prior sanction from the Centre. After a brief discussion, the Parliament endorsed the ordinance an Act on August 18, 1958, despite stiff resistance from various quarters who challenged it as a martial law. Needless to say, that on the pretext of controlling insurgency, this Act has only intensified the insurgency in these regions and legitimized thousands of gross human rights violations like rape, torture, murder and “disappearances” of innocent people in the North East and Jammu and Kashmir.

Perhaps you are aware that the hunger fast of human right activist from Manipur, Irom Sharmila Chanu has crossed 10 years, with a demand for repeal of AFSPA). She has been force fed through her nose by the Government, arrested with charges for attempt to commit suicide, criminalized as a high security prisoner, denying her access to family, friends, supporters and the media. It is regrettable that in this land of Gandhi, a non-violent protester has been subjected to such humiliation for more than ten years. Globally, in the history of non-violent resistance, this struggle is unmatched in terms of its resilience and sustaining power.

Various movements in the North East and Jammu and Kashmir and human rights groups across the country have consistently demanded the repeal of the Act. AFSPA is not only opposed by the civil society groups but also by the Government's own commissions and committees appointed to look into the matter. The Committee to Review the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, headed by Justice B. P. Jeevan Reddy in 2005, the Administrative Reforms Commission headed by Dr. Veerappa Moily in 2007 and several others have recommended its repeal. Internationally, UN bodies including the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the U N High Commissioner for Human Rights and recently the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders have urged for its repeal.

PUCL Bangalore invites all democratic forums, human rights groups, people's movements and concerned citizens to join in this Solidarity March on May 22, as first of the events planned in response to PUCL's nationwide call for campaign from May 22 to August 18 demanding immediate repeal of AFSPA and immediate release of Irom Sharmila in solidarity with people of North East and Jammu and Kashmir.