

9 April 2020

## **India: Police harassment, intimidation and arbitrary detention of human rights defender Dr. Laifungbam Debabrata Roy in Manipur**

On 3 April 2020, human rights defender **Dr. Laifungbam Debabrata Roy** was summoned to the office of the Superintendent of Police in Imphal, Manipur. The human rights defender was threatened with false charges and arbitrarily detained for 26 hours, in connection with a Facebook post he published on 2 April 2020.

[Dr. Laifungbam Debabrata Roy](#) is a medical practitioner and prominent human rights defender based in Imphal in the state of Manipur. He is the President of the Centre for Organization, Research and Education (CORE), Chairperson of the Steering Committee of Human to Humane Transcultural Centre for Trauma and Torture [H2H] and the Convener of the Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights in Manipur. He is also a member of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT) and a member of the health advisory committee of IRCT representing Asia Pacific.

On 3 April 2020, at around 5.30 pm, a team of armed police officers from Imphal West arrived at the human rights defender's residence and informed him that he was to be escorted to the office of the Superintendent of Police (SP) of the Imphal West Police Station immediately. No formal summons were produced, and the defender was not informed of any charges or a basis for such treatment.

At the Imphal West police station, Dr. Laifungbam Debabrata Roy was questioned about a Facebook post he made the previous day calling on the Chief Minister of Manipur to desist from wasting state resources in a time of crisis on any personal or political agenda or vendetta. The defender was threatened with a false case, despite there being no formal charges against him or a basis for his detention and interrogation. He was made to sign a letter to the Chief Minister expressing his regrets for the social media post. His nephew was compelled to sign an arrest memo, and his lawyer was shown an FIR which included the offence of "disobedience to follow order promulgated by public servant" under Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code. This FIR was never registered.

The human rights defender was held for approximately 26 hours at the police station, without being produced before a Magistrate. This by itself renders his detention arbitrary and illegal under Indian law. On 4 April 2020, he was finally released without charge, after he deleted the social media post and shot a video apologising for offending the Chief Minister. The right to receive and share information and express opinions, including dissent, is at the core of human rights defenders' work, ever more so in the context of the COVID-19 crisis spreading across India and the rest of the world. Holding public officers and duty bearers accountable through expression of dissent should not be the cause of reprisals and legal persecution of defenders, which is an alarming trend in India. Front Line Defenders has previously issued an [urgent appeal](#) regarding threats and legal persecution against members of the Youth's Forum of the Protection of Human Rights in Manipur.

Front Line Defenders condemns the intimidation, harassment and arbitrary detention of Dr. Debabrata Roy as it believes that they are a direct reprisal against his peaceful human rights work, and the exercise of his freedom of expression, which is protected under the Constitution of India. Front Line Defenders is extremely concerned about the safety of Dr. Debabrata Roy and other

human rights defenders in Manipur in the context of COVID-19 and increased reprisals by the State, through the use of police.

**Front Line Defenders urges the Indian authorities to:**

1. Immediately cease all acts of intimidation and reprisal against Dr. Debabrata Roy, especially those perpetrated by the State police, and take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of the human rights defender and his family at this difficult time;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the conduct of the Imphal West Police, who acted outside the scope of their authority and clearly violated due process in detaining Dr. Debabrata Roy without charge and without taking steps to produce him before Court within the stipulated time. Ensure that any such investigation is carried out with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Guarantee to Dr. Debabrata Roy his constitutionally protected fundamental freedoms, especially the fundamental right to freedom of expression protected under the Constitution;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in India are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.

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