

03 March 2020

India: Lawyers physically assaulted by police personnel

On 26 February 2020, lawyers from the Indian Civil Liberties Union were assaulted by police personnel when they went to inquire about detainees who were picked up from the riot that hit North East Delhi.

The Indian Civil Liberties Union (ICLU), formed in 2018, is a collective of lawyers, activists, paralegals and students from across India. It was formed to reach out and provide easily accessible information and free legal aid to Indian citizens, especially the poor, marginalised, and migrant labourers whose citizenship is threatened by the National Register of Citizens and the Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019 (CAA). The collective works to bring justice to those who are excluded and threatened by the prospect of statelessness. ICLU has been at the forefront of providing legal aid to students and protestors harassed, detained and arrested during the anti-CAA protests across India.

On 26 February 2020, a group of lawyers from ICLU, after receiving information about alleged detentions, went to Jagatpuri Police Station, to meet with those who had been detained from the riot that hit parts of north east Delhi. However, the police refused to give the lawyers access to the detainees. Further, when the lawyers insisted on meeting the detainees, the male police officers photographed and went on to manhandle the women lawyers who were part of the group. The male lawyers who protested this were slapped and beaten with a police baton. The group were finally forced to leave without having met the detainees.

Since the protests against the CAA began, several instances of police brutality and police inaction have been reported across the country.

Front Line Defenders is concerned by the physical attack and intimidation of the lawyers by the police officials, as it believes that this was solely due to their legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in India to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the physical assault of the lawyers from ICLU with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials;
2. 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.