

**DUBLIN**

Front Line Defenders – Head Office
First Floor, Avoca Court
Temple Road, Blackrock
Co. Dublin, A94 R7W3, Ireland

info@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +353 1 212 3750
fax +353 1 212 1001

BRUSSELS

Front Line Defenders – EU Office
Square Marie-Louise 72
1000 Brussels
Belgium

euoffice@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +32 2 230 9383
fax +32 2 230 0028

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India: Human rights defender Arkadeep Goswami facing threats

On 18 April 2023, human rights defender **Arkadeep Goswami** was threatened by two unidentified men at his residence in Kolkata, West Bengal and also via telephone. The two men visited his home on 18 April 2023 at around 3 PM when the human rights defender was not at home and questioned his parents about his whereabouts. They asked his mother to call Arkadeep Goswami and threatened him via phone to reveal his location.

[Arkadeep Goswami](#) is a human rights defender and freelance journalist based in the State of West Bengal. He works with [Banglar Manabdhikar Suraksha Mancha \(MASUM\)](#), an organisation working on human rights violations committed by state agencies including torture, extrajudicial killings and arbitrary detention. Arkadeep Goswami was an executive member of the All India Council for Student Struggles, a member of the All India University Students Fact Finding Team on Fake Encounters in 2017 and was part of the Justice for Rohith Vemula movement, demanding accountability in the case and an end to caste-based discrimination in the country (2016-2018). His work with MASUM and past campaigns for justice have resulted in reprisals especially false arrest, and false claims that led to his arrest and detention.

On 18 April 2023, two unidentified men visited Arkadeep Goswami's residence in Kolkata and questioned his parents about his whereabouts. They asked Arkadeep Goswami's mother to call him via telephone and threatened him to reveal details of his current location. The men refused to identify themselves clearly but claimed to have met the human rights defender when he was arrested and jailed under false charges in 2022. From the physical description provided by his mother and the voice of one of the callers, Arkadeep Goswami believes that at least one of the men was one of his captors linked to the Counter Insurgency Force (CIF), a special force associated with the West Bengal Police. Arkadeep Goswami also stated that he had not met anyone else during the time of his previous arrest and detention besides officials from law enforcement agencies.

On 24 April 2022, Arkadeep Goswami was forcibly taken from the market on the way to his home in Birbhum district of West Bengal by officials of the Special Task Force (STF) and CIF, brought to Barikul police station, nearly 200 kilometers from his home, and jailed for one and a half months on the basis of a fabricated case. The First Information Report (FIR) against him included serious offences – sedition (124A), waging war against the State (121) and rioting, armed with a deadly weapon (148), under the Indian Penal Code. The human rights defender was released on bail on 3 June 2022 but the case against him is still ongoing despite no charges having been filed to date. Arkadeep Goswami is also accused under an older case filed on 13 November 2018 which includes similar offences of sedition and waging war against the state as reprisal for his work documenting the treatment of political prisoners in West Medinipur district of West Bengal.

The recent intimidation of Arkadeep Goswami at his home and via telephone is a clear attempt to harass the human rights defender and intimidate his family. The reference by the unidentified men to his arrest in 2022 and the several ongoing criminal cases against Arkadeep Goswami raise credible fears for his mental and physical safety.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the ongoing harassment and false criminal charges against human rights defender Arkadeep Goswami as it believes them to be a reprisal for his

legitimate and peaceful human rights work. We are deeply concerned for his security and call on the Indian authorities to ensure his safety and to immediately cease harassment of the human rights defender.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities of India to:

1. Immediately quash all charges against the human rights defender Arkadeep Goswami as it believes them to be a reprisal against his legitimate and peaceful human rights work;
2. Cease all attempts to intimidate and harass Arkadeep Goswami and his family;
3. Initiate a thorough and impartial investigation into the false criminal charges against Arkadeep Goswami with a view to bringing perpetrators to justice according to international human rights standards;
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 police and judicial harassment.

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