

WAYANAD NATURE PROTECTION COMMITTEE (WNPC)
(WAYANAD PRAKRITI SAMRAKSHANA SAMITHI)

P. B. No. 1
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Ref:

Date: January 1, 2003.

To

1. His Excellency, Dr. A. P. J Abdul Kalam, President of India, Rashtrapathi Bhavan, New Delhi.
2. Honourable Prime Minister of India, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, Prime Minister's Office, Government of India, New Delhi.
3. Honourable Union Minister for Environment and Forests, Mr. T. R. Baalu, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, Paryavaran Bhavan, CGO Complex, Lodhi Road, New Delhi.
4. Honourable Ms. Sonia Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition (Lok Sabha) & President, All India Congress Committee (AICC), AICC Office, Asoka Road, New Delhi.
5. Dr. Klaus Topfer, Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), P. O. Box 30552, Nairobi, Kenya.
6. Dr. Nitin Desai, Under Secretary General, United Nations Organisation (UNO), UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA.
7. Dr. Sashi Tharoor, Public Information Division, UNO, UN Plaza, NY 10017, USA.
8. President, The World Bank (IBRD), 1818, H Street, Washington DC, USA.
9. Head, Environment Division, The World Bank (IBRD), 1818, H Street, Washington DC, USA.
10. Secretary, Ministry of Environment & Forests, Government of India, Paryavaran Bahavan, CGO Complex, New Delhi - 110 003.

Dear Sir,

We request your kind and urgent attention to a very serious issue concerning the remaining forest area of Kerala state, India (which is a core area of the Western Ghats - one of the 25 biodiversity hotspots in the world). The present Minister of Forests, Government of Kerala, Mr. K. Sudhakaran (belonging to the leading party in the coalition Government, the Indian National Congress), has been actively pursuing a policy of entrusting the forests to criminal gangs belonging to his group within the Congress Party in Kerala. The Minister, Mr. Sudhakaran, has started to issue murder threats openly against Forest Officers who refused to receive orders from the criminal gang leaders 'appointed' by him; and he has pronounced such threats (in front of his criminal gang leaders) when the Kerala Forest Protective Staff Association leaders visited him in his Ministerial Chamber at the State Government Secretariat at Trivandrum recently. The Staff Association leaders, with decades of experience in protecting the forests of Kerala, are shocked beyond imagination after hearing the Minister's murder threat against one of their colleague who refused to obey the orders issued by the leaders of the criminal gangs 'appointed' by the Minister to 'manage' the forests. In the half a century of democratic rule in the state of Kerala, this is the first time that a Minister utter murder threats (against an Officer and a Citizen), sitting in the Minister's chair, which prove beyond doubt the criminal past and the criminal present of the minister, Mr. K. Sudhakaran. Issuing such threats is, no doubt, a clear violation of the oath of Office made by him at the time of assuming the Office of the Minister. Through detailed inquiry within the Congress Party leadership, it has become clear that Mr. Sudhakaran

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has been acting even against party directives and many of his criminal gang leaders are people who are either suspended from the party or facing disciplinary actions or those with no involvement in the party activities. This indicates that the Minister, Mr. Sudhakaran and his criminal gangs are trying to apportion the forest wealth of Kerala among themselves for which they are threatening the Forest Department Officials who refuse to follow their dictates. In this process, the Minister and his agents are not only forcing Forest Officers to engage in corruption but also force them to waste public funds (especially the Forest Development Funds provided by the World Bank and other agencies) to gather tribal and other people for extravagant celebrations (like tribal gathering) in order to enlist people in his group within the Congress Party. The Forest Minister of Kerala, Mr. Sudhakaran, is acting like the Godfather of a mafia and he is building up his mafia group in all the forest areas of Kerala using public funds.

The Minister's and his criminal gang's aims and activities came to open recently through the illegal and untimely transfer of a highly dedicated Forester of Muthanga Range, Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary within the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. Mr. K. P. Abdul Wahab, who had been serving the Wayanad Forests for nearly three decades with high integrity and with deep commitment to Forest Protection (who also was instrumental in establishing the Wayanad Nature Protection Committee and also served as a prominent leader of the Kerala Forest Protective Staff Association for a long period), was transferred to an unimportant division with no direct connection with forest protection. The only reason for the action (decided unilaterally by the Minister, Mr. Sudhakaran and his criminal gang leaders) was that Mr. Abdul Wahab refused to obey the orders issued by certain leaders of the criminal gangs. The criminal gang leaders are trying their level best to place their members as casual labourers (Forest Watchers) and those already appointed, under direct instructions by the Minister, have started to boss even the Range Officers, Conservators and Divisional Forest Officers. It is a fact that many such appointment of Watchers are made after paying huge amounts to the criminal gang leaders 'appointed' by the Minister, Mr. K. Sudhakaran. Mr. Sudhakaran is issuing murder threat against Mr. Wahab now, who refused to accept the transfer meekly. Many other Forest Officers who were performing their duties as per law with integrity are harassed similarly. The Forest Protective Staff Association is on a war-path against the criminalisation of forest management and they are supported in their effort by a wide range of environmental and cultural activist groups. The struggle for decriminalisation of forest management will lead to a serious law and order problem if the Government of Kerala continued its deaf stand. The issue is already brought into the attention of the Chief Minister of Kerala and the Congress Party leadership (The Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee), but no meaningful action is forthcoming. Therefore, we request you to intervene in the issue immediately and give necessary directions to stop criminalisation of forest management in Kerala and to stop wasting funds intended for forest development and management. We demand immediate resignation or dismissal of the Kerala Forest Minister, Mr. K. Sudhakaran.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

General Secretary.

Thomas Ambalavayal.

