

To,

1. Dr. Khambampati Hari Babu
The Governor, Government of Odisha
2. YB Khurania
Director- General of Police, Odisha
3. Swathi S Kumar
Superintendent of Police, Rayagada District, Odisha
4. Nagaraj Deverakonda
Superintendent of Police, Kalahandi District, Odisha
5. Ashutosh Kulkarni
District Collector, Rayagada District, Odisha
6. Pawar Sachin Prakash
District Collector, Kalahandi District, Odisha
7. Manoj Ahuja
Chief Secretary of Odisha

15.8.2025

Subject: Odisha and National Lawyers demand Immediate Action to Curb the Actions of the Odisha police and District administrations, in relation to the Illegal Acquisition of Forest and Schedule V land, on behalf of M/s Vedanta Aluminum Ltd.

Dear Sir/ Madam,

We are writing to you to draw your immediate attention to the push to coercively divert land in the Kalahandi and Rayagada Districts for the Sijimali bauxite mining project, which is under the sole ownership and control of a multinational, Vedanta Ltd. The manner of land acquisition for Vedanta's bauxite mining project, ever since 2023, has resulted in egregious violation of law at all levels, with dire consequences for the lives and livelihoods of the people. This coercive and heavy-handed process is not serving a public purpose, nor adhering to crucial legal environmental provisions, nor abiding by the constitutional rights of Schedule V communities, as laid down in the Constitution of India. Rather, the highhanded intimidating actions, **including ongoing arrests of villagers**, are setting a new benchmark in obstructing the rule of law and the protection of citizens by the arbitrary actions of the police and the district administrations, on behest of a private mega-corporation.

The very latest incident, on 7.12.2025, saw men, dressed as civilians, attempting to abduct men and women village leaders in broad daylight in Sunger Chowk in Kashipur block. Right now, over 9 youth leaders are in jail, having been arrested and re-arrested multiple times.

The presence of armed police in the villages and the fear of random arrest has created such a reign of terror that men and women are not able to venture out of their villages for buying medicines for

their children or elderly parents when they fall sick. Worse, their daily economic activities have come to a halt.

Approximately half the land sought after by the project is protected forest and community controlled-land, and is around 710 acres. When villagers gather to make decisions about the diversion of this land, or when they oppose the flouting of established norms in obtaining necessary environmental and forest clearances, they have to face extreme brutality at the hands of the police. The general security and rights of **all Odisha residents**, as well as the integrity of the land, water, and forest, are at stake.

There are several illegal processes adopted by the district administrations of Rayagada and Kalahandi in Odisha, under the direction of the State government, in order to divert land, of which three stand out. These are described further in detail in this representation.

1. Diversion of forestlands without following the procedure under the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 or *Van Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan Adhiniyam, 1980*, for Vedanta's Sijimali Bauxite Mining Project.
2. Diversion of village common lands to Industrial Development Corporation of Odisha (IDCO) for the creation of a land-bank in Sijimali region for use by the said corporation.
3. Despite Sijimali being a Fifth Schedule Area, land acquisition is being taken without the consent of Gram Sabhas. Further details on this follow.

A. Manufactured Consent in Fake Gram Sabhas

The law requires that genuine, free, prior and informed consent of local people must be obtained for diversion of forest land for any non-forest purpose. Instead, the administration purportedly held 10 fake Gram Sabhas on 8.12. 2023 in Kantamal, Aliguna, Bundel, Katibhata, Pelanakona, Dumerpadar, Sagabari and Malipadar under Sunger Gram Panchayat of Kashipur block in Rayagada district and Chulbadi and Tijmali under Talaampadar Gram Panchayat of Thuamul Rampur block in Kalahandi district.

In response to RTI applications, Office of the Collector and District Magistrate, Kalahandi disclosed documents on 8.2.2024, revealing:

1. Villagers were forced to put thumbprints on the resolutions.
2. Company officials were present at the so-called Gram Sabhas accompanied by local goons and armed police personnel.
3. **All Gram Sabhas were allegedly held on the same date and at the same time across all the 10 villages, meaning that the Sarpanch or other government officials who have signed the Gram Sabha documents were present in ten different places on the same time and date.**

Thus, it is reasonable to believe that the Gram Sabhas allegedly held on 08.12.2024 were coerced and fictitious, and the resolutions therein were invalid. The presence of block-level officers, company officials, police and armed forces in a Gram Sabha was also a blatant intimidating tactic, and a violation of the people's constitutional right to live and make decisions with dignity.

The Governor's attention is here drawn to the fact that the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) has directed the Odisha government to conduct an enquiry into fake Gram Sabha allegations, but till date no enquiry has been initiated.

B. Gram Sabhas held refusing consent to mining and demanding action, but no FIRs registered

In September 2024, through a deliberative process, 10 special Gram Sabhas were held by the local communities and resolutions were passed refusing consent to the mining project, after which two complaints around fake Gram Sabhas and forging of signatures were also filed. The IICs of these police stations duly received these complaints and made station diary entries, but till date no FIRs have been registered in either police station. Instead, severe police repression on people was unleashed, as detailed below.

The above details were dutifully submitted to the Odisha High Court in WP(C) no. 3729/2025. In its Judgment and Order dated 5.5. 2025, the Hon'ble Odisha High Court directed in para 7 that: *...Petitioners have pointed out their rights under the Act of 2006 as provided under Section 3. We reiterate, Union of India must take note."*

Thereafter, representations have been sent to the Union government but no response has been received. As Governor of Odisha, you are invested with crucial constitutional power, authority and duty to ensure peace and good governance in the V Schedule Areas in the State of Odisha, for which you are accountable directly to Her Excellency The President of India. **Hence, we write to you, the Governor of Odisha, to urgently take keen attention of these events, and to intervene in the interest of law and justice and to ensure the constitutional objective of peace and good governance.**

C. Diversion of Lands for IDCO Land Bank

The Rayagada and Kalahandi district administrations have also been creating land banks in the name of IDCO. In gross violation of the constitutional and statutory obligation to protect and preserve forests, and in particular in violation of the mandate of the National Forest Policy 1988, the State government has proceeded to de-reserve protected forests to uncultivable wasteland and turn *gochar* land to *patita*, excluding the local communities from these common lands to make them available for corporate interests. The Sarpanchs have written to the relevant authorities in Rayagada and Kalahandi, questioning the lack of transparency in consent-giving processes adopted for land banks.

In Tijmali, the Kalahandi district administration has initiated private land acquisition processes for 70.500 acres, but again there is absolutely no information about this with the 30 aggrieved families whose lands are being targeted.

Such land acquisition is a blatant violation of the Orissa Scheduled Areas Transfer of Immovable Property (by Scheduled Tribes) Regulations, 1956, which has been issued by the Governor in exercise of powers under Paragraph 5(2)(a) of the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution, to 'prohibit or restrict the transfer of land by or among members of the Scheduled Tribes in such area'. **We urge the Governor to directly halt all land acquisition-related procedures in relation to Sijimali Bauxite Mines.**

D. The destruction of village social fabric through the intimidation, criminalisation and incarceration of leaders

The local communities, being dismayed by the violation of law at each level, have sought to express their views through the exercise of their constitutional and fundamental right to hold peaceful demonstrations under Article 19(1) of the Constitution. However, each time the local communities

gather, false criminal cases are filed against the villagers. There are also constant divisive tactics employed to provoke the community, which is leading to a breakdown of the social fabric. People are instructed to start verbal confrontations, leading to heated arguments, and then these incidents are used to file false cases against the villagers opposing the mining project.

Since June 2025, prohibitory orders and breach of peace summons under Section 163 of BNSS are also being slapped on respected members of the local community organization, Ma Mati Mali Surakhy Mancha, Rayagada and Kalahandi.

Most recently, the FAC, in its 12th committee meeting held on 02.12.2025 recommended to Odisha government for State level approval of stage 1 clearance to Vedanta's Sijimali bauxite mines for diversion of forest land for an area 708.24 hectares out of the total mining lease area of 1548.786 ha.

Even the lawyers being hired by the people to fight their cases and applications for bail conditions are being coerced by the police, at the behest of Vedanta, to seek 'compromise with the company for withdrawal of cases' or face lifelong jail sentences.

Members of the local communities who have been illegally detained and then arrested have shared that they have faced custodial torture and casteist and racist slurs during the detentions. They have been threatened against reporting the custodial torture to the Judicial Magistrates and warned that if anyone dares to complain, the jail officials and local police would ensure that they never get out of jail.

Furthermore, the police has attempted to stop **universal days of celebration like United Nations World Environment Day, United Nations World Indigenous Peoples' Day, and even the National Birsa Munda Jayanti**. The Notices falsely announce that people are gathering with "weapons to intimidate those supporting Vedanta".

The DGP needs to take immediate cognizance of such deliberate and unprofessional practices as being condoned and facilitated by local police administration, and restore confidence of the people in the impartiality and protective role of the police.

The Hon'ble Governor and DGP can be provided with a list of such detained leaders, including Padman Naik, Kartik Naik, and Labanya Naik (Bhawanipatna jail), and Naringi Dei Majhi, Jaleswar Naik, Ramakant Naik, Mithun Naik, Sundar Singh Majhi and Laxman Naik (Rayagada jail) and the details of the fake charges.

IMMEDIATE ACTION must be taken to intervene and halt the above transgressions which have been undertaken solely with the view of handing over pristine community managed and forest land to Vedanta Ltd. The police must be held accountable for failing to perform their duty in protecting the vulnerable citizens of the country, but rather be complicit in intimidation, detention, harassment, and torture. **There is absolutely no excuse for colonial-era levels of subjugation of citizens, and the deliberate breakdown of fair and law-abiding administration, in a free India.**

We, therefore, DEMAND

1. A review of the Lease granted to Vedanta Ltd.
2. The revocation of all FIRs against village leaders, their immediate release, and due compensation paid for illegal arrest and torture.

3. End further preventive arrests and harassment of the local communities.
4. Halt of all works in the area, including all land acquisition, till the Gram Sabhas make voluntary decisions in a fearless environment.
5. Any police deployment be made a policy decision with the approval of the Gram Sabhas.
6. Conduct an inquiry into all police officials at all levels who have given orders to harass and intimidate villagers who are attempting to protect their lives, livelihood and land, by abiding by the law enshrined in the Constitution of India.
7. Prohibit the further presence of the Company staff in villages, attempting to turn villagers against each other.

Regards,

Kavita Srivastava, President, PUCL
 V. Suresh, General Secretary, PUCL

For more information:

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Lawyers and law students who have signed the letter:

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3. Mihir Desai, Senior Advocate, Mumbai (PUCL)
4. Sudha Bharadwaj, Advocate, Mumbai (PUCL)
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10. Sudeep Singh, Advocate, Bhatinda, Punjab (Association for Democratic Rights, Punjab)
11. Narendra Mohanty, Advocate, Bhubaneswar (Campaign Against Fabricated Cases)
12. Ahmed Shaik, Advocate, Hyderabad (Human Rights Forum)

and 118 others. The complete list of signatories is given here:

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