

STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY

Release Randall Sequeira and Laxman Naik immediately and unconditionally. End the criminalisation of the Sijimali, Khandualamali and Niyamgiri movements.

18th October, 2026

The Medico Friend Circle (MFC) strongly condemns the arrest of Dr. Randall Sequeira and Shri Laxman Naik of the Maa Mati Mali Surakhya Manch. These arrests are in the context of the **constitutionally legitimate** struggle of the Adivasi and Dalit communities of the Sijimali hills against the improper lease of the hills to Vedanta Ltd. and neighbouring Kutrumali hills to the Adani Group's Mundra Aluminium Ltd by the Government of Odisha for the purpose of Bauxite mining. We demand their immediate and unconditional release.

Dr. Randall Sequeira and Shri Laxman Naik were picked up by Bhawanipatna Town police from Dr. Sequeira's residence in Hill Town, Bhawanipatna, Kalahandi, Odisha, at around 11 pm on 16 October 2026. Two police jeeps surrounded the house. Around six policemen, most of them in **plain clothes** and led by the Inspector-in-Charge of Bhawanipatna Town police station, entered the home **without a warrant or notice and without stating any reason**. They took away both men's phones **without a seizure memo** and took the two men to Bhawanipatna Town police station, where they were **held through the night without access to lawyers** or family. At around 6 am on 17 October they were moved out of Bhawanipatna. For the next twelve hours, police refused to tell their lawyers or families where they were being taken or what they were charged with. They were finally produced before the Sub-Divisional Judicial Magistrate (SDJM), Rayagada, at 6:30 pm on 17 October. Yet the official intimation sent to Dr. Sequeira's home records his arrest at 10 am on 17 October. It makes **no mention of the night spent in police custody or his transfer to Rayagada district** though Section 48 of the BNSS requires notification of a relative, friend or another person nominated by the arrested person.

Laxman Naik's family reports **not receiving any notice at all**, though the law requires one under Section 48 of the BNSS. When they were produced, the magistrate did not ask them how they had been treated in custody, and did not record Dr. Sequeira's account of their ill-treatment and the seizure of their phones. Their **bail applications were rejected**, and both were sent to Rayagada Sub-Jail. The present arrests, occurring just before the courts close for vacation until 27 October, risk making the process itself a punishment.

These arrests are part of a sustained pattern where the state is responding to dissent with repression rather than a dialogue.

Dr. Randall Sequeira and Shri Laxman Naik have been arrested in Kashipur Police Station **Case No. 85/2026**. The case relates to the night of 6 - 7 April 2026 in Kantamal village, Rayagada. That night a large police contingent entered the village, and **indiscriminate lathi charges and tear gas firing** injured many villagers as well as police personnel. Neither Dr.

Sequeira nor Laxman Naik is named in this FIR. Yet the police have charged them with a battery of grave offences under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita:

- Attempt to murder (Sec. 109(1))
- Rioting, and rioting armed with a deadly weapon (Sec. 191(2), 191(3))
- Dacoity (Sec. 310(2))
- Criminal intimidation by threat of death or grievous hurt (Sec. 351(3))
- Assault and causing grievous hurt to deter public servants from their duty (Sec. 132, 121(2))
- Wrongful restraint and confinement (Sec. 126, 127(2))
- Obscene acts in public (Sec. 296)
- Liability as members of an unlawful assembly (Sec. 190)
- Use of arms in violation of the law (Section 27 of the Arms Act)

Dr. Sequeira already holds anticipatory bail in Case No. 87/2026, which concerns the same incident and in which he is named. These arrests are in the context of the struggle of the Adivasi and Dalit communities of the Sijimali hills against the lease of the hills to Vedanta Ltd. by the Government of Odisha for the purpose of Bauxite mining.

The Sijimali (Tijimali) hills straddle the border of Rayagada and Kalahandi districts, and the Vedanta lease alone covers about 1,549 hectares, more than 700 of them forest. For the Kondh, Paraja and Dalit communities who live here, the hills are sacred and feed the streams, fields and forests their lives depend on. The area falls under the **Fifth Schedule**, where PESA and the Forest Rights Act require the free consent of gram sabhas. Villagers say that consent was taken in 2023 under coercion and heavy police presence. Since then they have resisted peacefully under the Maa Mati Mali Surakhya Manch, and the state has answered with repression. At least 43 police cases have been filed and over a hundred Adivasis and Dalits jailed. Between 8 March and 8 April 2026 alone, 24 people were jailed, 217 named as accused and 1,140 listed as unnamed “others”. Dr. Sequeira himself was banned from Rayagada in 2025, an order the Orissa High Court struck down as “arbitrary and unconstitutional.”

Dr. Randall Sequeira is a physician who has spent years taking healthcare to Adivasi communities in the remote hills of Kalahandi and Rayagada, villages that often have no road and no functioning health facility. He has done extensive work to strengthen community health workers in places the public health system barely reaches. As a long-standing member of MFC, he represents what our network has stood for over five decades: that health cannot be separated from land, water, food, livelihood and dignity. The individuals mentioned in this document are defending rights guaranteed by the Constitution, the Forest Rights Act and PESA. **Their dissent is not a crime.**

Health workers must never be persecuted for their work or for standing with the people they provide care for, and MFC stands firmly against every such attempt to intimidate, criminalise or silence them.

We demand:

1. Immediate and unconditional release of Dr. Randall Sequeira and Shri Laxman Naik,.
2. An urgent bail hearing for Dr. Sequeira and Laxman Naik before the vacation court, without waiting for 27 October.
3. A judicial inquiry into the legality of their overnight detention, the alleged failure to prepare an arrest memo or communicate the grounds of arrest, the discrepancy in the recorded arrest time, the seizure of their phones without a memo, and the reported failure to notify Laxman Naik's family, with action against any officers found responsible.
4. Sealing of their phones in the presence of their lawyers, so that no evidence can be planted.
5. An independent review of all cases filed against villagers and activists in Sijimali, Kutrumali and Niyamgiri since 2023, withdrawal of any cases found to be fabricated, and an end to serial re-arrests.
6. A halt to all mining-related work pending an independent review of the disputed gram sabha proceedings and compliance with applicable land acquisition, forest rights and forest-clearance requirements.

We stand in solidarity with the people of the Malis and of Niyamgiri in their struggle to protect their land, forests, hills and way of life.

Signed,
Medico Friend Circle

[Individuals: name, affiliation]

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