

SAMPLE LETTER – Please adapt and personalise

Honourable Chief Minister, Chhattisgarh, Shri Bhupesh Baghel

I am writing to express my deep concern at the arbitrary arrest on the 9th of March, of Hidme Markam, a respected human and environmental rights defender and a leader of the Nandraj Pahad anti-mining movement. She was taken by police at an International Women's Day event, also attended by a Sub Divisional Magistrate, where she was speaking out on behalf of several young women who have lost their lives as a consequence of brutal sexual violence committed against them by the police and security forces.

Upon inquiry by friends, the police stated that they had "arrested" Hidme on multiple charges including Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). However, these charges appear to be have been proliferated post-facto. Even the FIRs against her show several important contradictions. She is identified by the police as an unarmed member of a banned women's group and also as an armed member. The name used in the documents does not match that of the person arrested who is widely known and respected, whose work is entirely in the public eye and who has met with police and other officials on numerous occasions to raise cases of human rights abuses.

As a co-leader of the Nandraj Pahad Bachao Andolan, Hidme Markam has been involved in resistance to the Bailadila Mine Deposit Project which will destroy the Nandraj hill, sacred to the local Indigenous people. Mining in the area by Adani Pvt Ltd and others would also result in severe ecological damage in the region especially to the local forest, land and water and is a grave breach of Adivasi constitutional rights.

As a member of the Chhattisgarh Mahila Adhikar Manch, Hidme has been present in numerous public spaces and meetings in Chhattisgarh, asserting the constitutional rights of Adivasi women, especially against displacement and state repression. As convener of the Jail Bandi Rihai Committee (Committee for Release of Prisoners), she has been vocal in the demand for the release of thousands of innocent Adivasis implicated and incarcerated in false cases

Dear Chief Minister, you should be concerned as to why she has been arrested at this particular time when she has been continuously present in public and has in fact met with many important officials including the Governor, Chief Minister, Superintendent of Police and Collector to demand the release of arrested Adivasis, an end to construction of para military camps in the region and a halt to mining.

Her 'arrest' which seems more like an abduction, must be an embarrassment as it adds yet another shameful layer to the harassment she has already faced. Surely it must be difficult for the government to explain the arrest of an Adivasi woman activist who is to drawing the attention of the state and police authorities to violations of constitutional rights.

I therefore respectfully ask you to

- a. Free Hidme Markam and drop all charges against her, including all UAPA matters.
- b. Stop the attacks on environmental, Adivasi and other human rights activists as well as on Adivasi villagers in Chhattisgarh, in particular on women, on the pretext of 'combating Naxalism'.
- c. Halt all potentially destructive projects that displace Adivasis and jeopardize the environment and start a dialogue with Adivasi communities which respects their constitutional, PESA and FRA rights

Yours faithfully/sincerely