

December 4, 2020

The Honourable François-Philippe Champagne
Minister of Foreign Affairs
House of Commons
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Dear Minister Champagne,

I am writing to you once more, a follow-up to my first letter dated 13 October 2020, to let you know of the worsening situation of Fr Stan Swamy SJ, an Indian Jesuit priest who was taken into custody by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) of India last October 8, 2020, for alleged Maoist links. Fr Stan and 15 other human rights defenders arrested under similar charges, have been incarcerated based on unsubstantiated charges. Fr Stan is 83 years old and suffers from Parkinson's disease. He has been denied the use of a straw and a cup, essential items for him to be able to drink on his own. This is a direct violation of his basic human rights.

His situation is not the worst of the 16 human rights defenders wrongfully imprisoned. Varavara Rao, a renowned writer and poet in India, was transferred from his prison cell to a hospital because of ill-health. The 78 year-old activist remains in a hospital in spite of the repeated attempts of the NIA to have him transferred back to prison.

Fr Stan's situation and that of the 15 other human rights defenders continue to make international news. Their incarceration is being condemned by people globally. The members of parliament in the United Kingdom have even devoted time during their question period to discuss what their government is doing to address this issue.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau recently said at a virtual APEC gathering that *"If you're a country of the rule of law, if you're a country of values, you need to stick up for those."* Our country has publicly declared its commitment to championing the values of inclusivity and accountable governance; peaceful pluralism and respect for diversity; and human rights including the rights of those most marginalized in society.

Would it not be a failure to live up to those values if Canada continues to remain silent regarding the case of the 16 human rights defenders in India? Can we simply remain as spectators as the rights of Fr Stan and his 15 companions continue to be violated?

We ask again that the Government of Canada strongly condemn the incarceration of Fr Stan Swamy and the other 15 human rights defenders, ask the Indian Government to ensure their immediate release and ask it to refrain from arbitrary arrests of innocent citizens.

We ask the Government of Canada to act as quickly as possible for the sake of Fr Stan Swamy, Varavara Rao and the other human rights defenders whose health and very lives are at risk. We know that a number of people who have been incarcerated during the global COVID-19 pandemic have contracted the virus in prison, making this matter all the more urgent.

Yours sincerely,



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Provincial Superior/Supérieur provincial
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