

Dear All,

This is a call for your support and solidarity to the struggle of Irom Sharmila Chanu, the Manipuri activist poet, who has been on an indefinite fast for the last five years, since November 2000, demanding the withdrawal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 from Manipur.

We write to you on behalf of the Theeradesa Mahilavedi, a fisher women's group and a part of the larger fisher people's union, the Kerala Independent Fishworkers Federation (KSMTF) in Kerala. Our activities and campaigns have included the right of fisher women to use public transport; the right to live and work with dignity; struggles against sexual harassment and rape; struggles against communalism; and activities through which we try to increase our economic security by organizing non-funded self-help and micro-credit. As part of the KSMTF, we have consistently taken up struggles against globalization, trawling, deep sea trawling and mining and many other livelihood issues.

As a women's group we strongly campaign for a life of dignity and for freedom from sexual and other forms of violence not just in Kerala but everywhere. We are deeply aware however, that in the North Eastern states in India, rape and a range of violence that includes arbitrary detentions, "disappearances", killings, and loot are being actively used by security forces to terrorize and subordinate local communities. The official sanction that allows security forces to commit such barbaric crimes with utter impunity comes from the enforcement of the draconian Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, ostensibly to contain armed oppositional movements in India's northeast. This legislation arms security forces with supreme power and also legal immunity.

We strongly believe that marginalized movements not just in India but all over must join hands in struggle against patriarchal and State violence. Towards this end, we extend our strongest support to Irom Sharmila Chanu, the Manipuri activist poet, who has been on indefinite hunger fast since November 2000, demanding the withdrawal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, as an essential prerequisite to bringing peace in Manipur. We are launching this signature campaign as a solidarity gesture and we plan to use the signatures to petition concerned central and state government representatives in the very near future.

*In view of the forthcoming 7th National Conference of Autonomous Women's Movements to be held in Kolkata between 9th and 12th September, 2006, we urge your organization to endorse this solidarity statement. Please email your endorsement or post it to us at the following address, so that it reaches us **before September 10th, 2006.***

*Magline Peter/Freeska Kurishapan,
Address: Theeradesa Mahilavedi, KSMTF Women's Wing, Alakal Office, Garuda Building, Statue Road, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala - 1
Email: tmv@sify.com*

*Thanking you,
In solidarity and struggle,*

***Magline Peter and Freeska Kurishapan,
On behalf of Theeradesa Mahilavedi***

Thiruvananthapuram, 03 Sep 2006

Listen to Irom Sharmila's Voice of Conscience! Repeal the Armed Forces Special Powers Act Now!

We, the undersigned women's groups, express our gravest concern at the deteriorating health of the Manipuri activist poet, Irom Sharmila Chanu and strongly urge the government to take immediate steps to address the issue that has prompted her to undertake an indefinite hunger fast since November 2000, namely, the withdrawal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (1958) from Manipur.

For more than forty years, Manipur has been living in the shadow of State violence. The draconian Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) imposed in Manipur continuously since 1958 equips both commissioned and non-commissioned security forces with unrestricted powers. These include:

- The power to arrest and enter property without warrant
- The power to shoot, arrest, and kill at the mere hint of suspicious activity, even without the lives of members of the security force being at imminent risk
- Immunity to security forces against legal action

Ostensibly deployed to contain insurgency, the AFSPA empowers security forces with overarching authority along with protection against prosecution. This dangerous mix of supreme power with supreme non-accountability in the hands of armed security forces actively encourages the abuse of power and completely undermines the democratic framework of the Indian state.

Not surprisingly, the enforcement of the AFSPA has resulted in innumerable incidents of arbitrary detention, "disappearances", torture, rape, loot and killings by security forces. It has created an atmosphere of siege for the Manipuri people causing them to lose all confidence and faith in the Indian State and security forces.

The State-sponsored violence has had a devastating impact on women. Women have been subjected to horrific rape and sexual violence. The custodial rape and murder of the Manipuri activist, Thangjam Manorama, that shamed the nation and provoked mothers in Manipur to stage a desperate protest against security forces is just one instance of the complete violation of human rights being committed in the name of law enforcement.

When people are abducted and detained by security forces or shot in the streets in the name of law enforcement, women face untold suffering as they attempt often single-handedly to reconstruct their lives and nurture their families. When disillusioned youth abandon their dreams, and instead embrace guns, drugs, alcohol or prostitution, easily succumbing to HIV/AIDS, peace is taken away from the communities that women struggle so hard to hold together. The State-sponsored violence, legitimated by the imposition of the AFSPA, has bequeathed to the people of Manipur a legacy of terror and despair.

The indefinite hunger fast launched by Irom Sharmila Chanu, the Manipuri activist and poet, as a spontaneous reaction of outrage to the police firings in Malom district on November 2nd, 2000, which killed 10 innocent and unarmed civilians, has now entered its fifth year. The protest has but one demand: the withdrawal of the AFSPA.

Today, Irom Sharmila, arrested for attempted suicide, is force-fed in judicial custody by a nasal tube. Her condition is rapidly deteriorating. However, far from giving up the struggle, she continues to campaign through poems and newspaper articles for the

lifting of the black law. Her non-violent protest won international recognition when she was nominated for the Nobel Peace prize in 2005 by women's groups in north east India.

By ignoring Irom Sharmila's voice of conscience and by opting for a military solution to what is a political problem, the Indian government is further alienating the hearts and minds of the Manipuri people. The mushrooming of insurgency groups in Manipur in recent times proves that the AFSPA is not merely failing miserably in its primary objective but creating a climate of repression where innocent people are the victims of the crossfire between the State on the one hand and on the other, increasing numbers of armed oppositional movements.

We, the undersigned, extend our fullest support to Irom Sharmila and join her in demanding the immediate withdrawal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (1958) as a fundamental precondition to bringing peace and justice to the troubled state of Manipur.

	Name of Representative	Organization
1	Sr. Esther Pratiti	Domestic Workers Forum, Delhi
2	E Rati Rao	Samata Vedike, Mysore
3	Kranti	Forum Against Oppression of Women, Mumbai.
4	Meena	LABIA, Mumbai
5	Ajitha K	Anweshi, Kerala
6	A.Arokiamary	Tamilnadu social service society
7	Kiran Kumari	Prerana Bharti, Madhopur
8	Anjumbano	Bachpan
9	K.Jothi	AWC
10	T.Arulselvi	Women's collective
11	Josphine	VWDS
12	R.Mercy	WC
13	G.Annal	PADO
14	D.Kalyani	Award
15	Manimala	Books for change
16	Sushama Varma	Committee Against Violence Against Women
17	Poonam	Janmukti sankashvahini
18	Laxmi Murthy	Saheli, Delhi
19	Lum Nan	Kanchin O+ organization of India
20	Nawn Di	Central chin women's organisation
21	Joyies.M.T.Zaha	Women League Chinland
22	Phyo Phyo Kyaing	Tavoy women's union
23	Cherry	Women's league of Burma
24	Mai Lucy Mawite	Chin national league for democracy/Exile
25	Ah Zia	Violence against women
26	Nengboi	Kuki women human rights organization
27	Sahana Basavapatna	The Other Media
28	Gargi Banergi	Sanhita Calcutta
29	Fathima Neteson	tvwm
30	K Komala	Dwds
31	Reji Jansi	Cds
32	Rajadevi	Women's collective
33	R Vasantha	Guide
34	P Meena	Women's voice
35	Kiran	shambhams
36	Vrushali Pendharkar	OLAVA, Pune

37	M.Anthonymary	Award
38	Lea Krivchenia	
39	Kaneen	Samthana
40	Akshara	Media collective, Mumbai
41	Deepti	Wenlido Trainers Network, and Saheli
42	Razia Chougale	Awaz e niswaan, Mumbai
43	Bijoya Chanda	Sappho for Equality & Association for Protection of Democratic Rights
44	Kalyani	Jagori, Delhi
45	Sreekala	North east network
46	Malika	Maati, Munsiyari, Uttaranchal
47	Freeska Kurisappan	theeradesamahilavedi
48	Sreekala	Jamia university
49	Adv.Uma S	
50	Kusum	Purogrami mahila Sanghatan
51	Magline	Theeradesa Mahilavedi
52	P Vasantha	Sneha
53	Sandya	
54	Jothi Amala	WIDA
55	M. Deena	Rural Development Association
56	P. Kanni Maria	IRDWDC
57	A.Arokia Mary	LAMP
58	Saumya Uma	Womens Research & Action Group
59	Selvi	Tamil Nadu Women's Collective
60	Moumita Raghavan	SOHGAPH
61	Kuhu Das	Association of Women with Disabilities, Kolkata
62	Mamta Singh	Humsafar
63	Kamal	Sahiyar, Baroda, Gujarat
64	Reshma	Stree Sangattan
65	Jileswary	The ANT The Action of North East
66	Purnima	Nirantar, Delhi
67	L Manchi	PBCA
68	Ranjana Padhi	Workers' Solidarity, Delhi
69	Gabriele D	Pennurmai Iyakkam
70	A Thamayanthy	Sneha Fish workers federation Tamil Nadu - Nagai
71	Sudeepa	Initiatives Women in Development
72	Sangeeta Kanera	Narmada Bachao Andolan
73	C Jayamani	LGWC Tamilnadu Women Collective
74	Rekha Solanki	Mahila Jan Adenesh Samithy Manch
75	Dorothy Fernades	Wani
76	Shiviani Patel	Paiyavaram Sureksha Samithy
77	Pratirnapati	APREAD
78	Manika Mandal	Jharkhand Hulgulan
79	Shyamali Das	JUDAV
80	Nilanjana Biswas	Bangalore
81	V Vanaja	Manasa, Bangalore
82	Payal	Global Right
83	Sr. Celia	National Alliance of Peoples Movements
84	Nagamma	Prethi Mahilodaya

