

## ‘ACCOUNTABILITY MUST BE FIXED FOR COUNTER FIRS AGAINST RTI ACTIVISTS’

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Peoples' Participation-Role of Civil Society in Governance

Justice Madan B. Lokur, former Supreme Court Judge, here on Saturday said accountability must be fixed when the Right To Information activists are subjected to harassment through the usage of counter complaints in police stations.

Responding to allegations of harassment and the attack on activists at a State level public hearing on ‘Attacks on RTI users and Protection of Whistleblowers in Odisha,’ Justice Lokur said, “Everyone knows a false complaint or counter first information report is fabricated. But, no action is taken against those who file counter FIRs whereas the information seekers face harassment.”

“We have to find ways of dealing with the culture of counter FIRs against RTI activists. We have to build a public movement against the practice. Lawyers should be consulted as to how to end the counter FIR practice,” said the veteran judge.

“The bureaucracy appears to have become passive to RTI queries. There are no certainties when the queries would be replied. Many don’t know when to go for first and second appeal. Inaction of officers and police investigators are weakening the RTI Act,” he pointed out.

The former Supreme Court judge advised the activists to create a panel of advocates at the district and State level and take help from the legal service authorities to deal with the situation.

Aruna Roy, a prominent social activist, said, “We have to resort to regular nationwide agitation. The governments across the country are trying to suppress information and harass information seekers. The RTI Act is the only piece of legislation through which we can question the system.”

At the public hearing organised by the Odisha Soochana Adhikar Abhijan (OSSAA) and the National Campaign for People’s Right to Information (NCPRI) and SAFAR, Ms. Roy and Nikhil Dey, co-convener of the NCPRI, demanded the implementation of Section 4 of the RTI Act which asks for the creation of a dedicated portal for the dissemination of information.

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