

APDR'S TRIBUTE TO DR. K. BALAGOPAL

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South Asia Citizens Web; 9 October 2009

APDR (Association for the Protection of Democratic Rights) is stunned to learn the sudden and untimely demise of Dr. K. Balagopal at only 52. Dr. Balagopal was one of the few outstanding personalities in post seventy India who shaped and build up a formidable voice and organisation for civil liberties, democratic rights and human rights. His insight in the theory and practice of rights movement and the issues involved was reflected in a large number of incisive and thought provoking articles. These articles contributed enormously in understanding the politics and dynamics of the rights movement and were almost universally appreciated - even by his critiques and those who opposed his views.

Dr. Balagopal travelled through the length and breadth of this huge country - from North-East to Jammu & Kashmir, from his home state Andhra to Gujarat on arduous and painstaking mission of fact finding on Human Rights Violation. Often he led a group of activists from various states, speaking different languages, having little or no previous experience in fact finding. Most such missions were undertaken in most unfavourable terrains in the face of perceptible threats of being attacked by the machineries of the State and perpetrators of human rights violation. The brilliantly prepared and well documented reports of such fact findings, the preparation of which were mostly shouldered by Dr Balagopal proved to be most scathing exposure of the violation of human rights and the illegal activities of the state and non-state perpetrators.

About ten years ago he resigned from the professorship of Kakatiya University and joined the legal profession and had argued dozens of cases pertaining to encounter killings by the police. His acumen in National and International laws, particularly rights related laws and practices was an asset for the Human Rights Movement. His arguments before the NHRC in 1997 on behalf of the APCLC opposing the then Solicitor General's views resulted in a historic recommendation of lodging FIRs against and prosecuting all police officials claiming to have killed a person in an 'encounter'. This recommendation which was further strengthened by several

Supreme Court and High Court judgments is now facing an axe. Dr. Balagopal's absence at this juncture will be a huge loss. One of his last contributions for protection and expansion of Human Rights agenda is the report prepared by a team of experts engaged by the Planning Commission titled Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas.

In this 2009 October, when all the arsenal at the State's disposal is being lined up for a fight to the finish offensive against the Maoists fashioned as "Operation Green Hunt" next month, the observations and recommendations of the report are most scathing repudiation of the State's wrong policy of full-fledged war against its own citizen modelled in the Lalgah campaign and as prescribed by America led so called war against terrorism.

His views on some contentious issues involving theory and practices of Human Rights movement are still being debated among the rights movement community - all of us will miss our Balagopal's presence which is so important for continuing the debate(s) and clinching issues In course of such debates he left, may be, had to leave the APCLC and formed Human Rights Forum (HRF) with likeminded activists in 2000 and continued the struggle for Human Rights.

APDR is proud of being associated with such a towering personality for about two decades and will fondly remember his able leadership, his resolute firmness in the face of odds and his care for the fellow activists.

Learning Balagopal's demise sent me back to the days, hours and moments of anxiety, expectation and terror we, a thirteen member team faced in course of the first all India team's fact finding in Jammu and Kashmir in 1995, or when we crisscrossed West Bengal for gathering facts and studying Human Rights situation in the wake of Left Front Government's then just started and still ongoing offensive against the people in the guise of combating Maoists and other opposition groups like KLO, GKBM.

We from APDR express our profound condolences on the sad demise of Dr. K. Balagopal and vow our resolve to carry forward our movement for a just democratic society where the right of every human to live with dignity and without fear of persecution irrespective of caste, creed, race, religion and political belief will be ensured.

We hereby convey our deep condolences and sympathy to Dr. Balagopal's wife, son and other members of the family, activists of the HRF and the Human Rights activists community.