



Jesuit Conference of European Provincials
Rue des Trévires, 3
1040 Brussels

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
European Commission
Brussels
Belgium

20th April 2021

Dear Mr Borrell,

We, the members of the Jesuit Conference of European Provincials, gathered in our General Assembly, are writing to you today concerning the unjust imprisonment of one of our confreres, Fr Stan Swamy, by the Indian Government. We would ask of you that you use your good offices to do what is possible to have him set free.

Fr Stan Swamy is a Jesuit priest who will be 84-years old on April 26th. He is not only elderly but also in poor health, suffering from Parkinson's disease. He has spent the last fifty years defending the human rights of the poorest and most marginalized communities in central India, particularly the indigenous people, the *adivasis*. His activities include researching and documenting abuses of power against young *adivasis* and others who have been unjustly imprisoned.

On 8th October 2020, Fr Swamy was taken into custody by the National Investigation Agency of India under the anti-terror law, Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, accused falsely of having links with Maoists. This was in relation to an event that took place in Pune on 31st December 2017 and which was attended by 35,000 people (including 2 retired judges) – though not by Fr Swamy. The event ended in violence in which one person died.

In spite of vigorously denying any involvement with that event, Fr Swamy was detained alongside fifteen others. Among that group are distinguished human rights lawyers, Arun Ferreira and Sudha Bharadwaj, and writers Vernon Gonsalvez and Varavara Rao.

Fr Swamy's predicament has rightly aroused interest and concern across the globe. An international campaign – 'Stand with Stan' – has attracted huge support. He has now spent over 190 days, including Christmas and Easter, behind bars in Taloja prison in Mumbai. Shortly before Easter, the Special NIA court rejected the bail application based on the merit of the case. The same court had earlier rejected his bail application on medical grounds. There can be no serious doubt that Fr Swamy and his fellow detainees are the victims of state-sponsored harassment as a result of their opposition to government policy towards the *adivasi* people.

A statement from the Jesuit Curia in Rome strongly condemned the decision of the Court:

We stand united with Stan and many other human rights defenders at this crucial juncture. We commit ourselves to continue our effort, both nationally and internationally, to bring truth and justice to light and advocate for the rights of vulnerable people in a peaceful, non-violent way.

For his part, Fr Stan said in a video message recorded just two days before his arrest:

What is happening to me is not something unique or happening to me alone. It is a broader process that is taking place all over the country... I am happy to be part of this process because I am not a silent spectator but part of a game and ready to pay the price for it, whatever be it.

For more information see: <https://www.jesuits.global/?s=swamy>

We call upon the European Union to do all it can to defend Fr Swamy from the persecution he is facing. Already, 21 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and the three Presidents from the main political groups have sent a letter to the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, and to the Ambassador of India to Belgium, Mr. Santosh Jha, asking for the immediate liberation of Fr Swamy on humanitarian grounds. The Union's values of tolerance, religious liberty, human dignity and the rule of law need to be at the heart of our foreign policy. We ask you to condemn the incarceration of Fr Swamy and his fellow human rights campaigners, and to call on the Indian Government to ensure their immediate release. And we ask that this be done speedily, as the health and safety of these innocent people are at risk, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Yours faithfully,

Fr. Franck Janin, SJ (President of the Jesuit Conference of European Provincials)

Co-signers:

Fr. Miguel Almeida, SJ (Portugal)

Fr. François Boëdec, SJ (France, Greece, Luxembourg, Belgium)

Fr. Bernhard Bürgler, SJ (Austria)

Fr. Roberto Del Riccio, SJ (Albania, Italy, Malta, Romania)

Fr. Marc Desmet, SJ (The Netherlands, Belgium)

Fr. Antonio España Sánchez, SJ (Spain)

Fr. Damian Howard, SJ (Great Britain)

Fr. Leonard Moloney, SJ (Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland)

Fr. Tomasz Ortmann, SJ (Poland, Denmark)

Fr. Jaroslaw Paszynski, SJ (Poland, Ukraine)

Fr. Petr Přádka, SJ (Czech Republic)

Fr. Dalibor Renić, SJ (Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro)

Fr. Jan Roser, SJ (Germany, Sweden)

Fr. Christian Rutishauser, SJ (Switzerland)

Fr. Vidmantas Šimkunas, SJ (Lithuania, Latvia)

Fr. Jozef Šofranko, SJ (Slovakia)

Fr. Elemér Vízi, SJ (Hungary)

Fr. Michael Zammit, SJ (Algeria, Egypt, Irak, Lebanon, Holy Land, Jordan, Morocco, Syria, Turkey)

Fr. Miran Žvanut, SJ (Slovenia)