

## A STATEMENT OF PROTEST

We the undersigned strongly and univocally condemn the ban imposed on Revolutionary Democratic Front (RDF) by the Andhra Pradesh government on 9 August 2012 under Andhra Pradesh Public Security Act 1992. We stand opposed to this arbitrary and authoritarian action by the government on a peoples' organization which goes against the principles of justice, freedom of expression, freedom of association and of democratic dissent. Further the persistent use of ban as an instrument of policy is politically motivated as is proven in history. It has been proved time and again that whatever might be the purpose of evoking the policy of ban by the respective governments at various junctures it has hardly resulted in the achieving the same. On the contrary it has only resulted in more and more atrocities on the vast sections of the people with the policy of ban giving blanket powers to the police and paramilitary thus resulting in increasing acts of impunity. We are therefore forced to believe that the imposition of a ban on RDF on a series of unsubstantiated charges is not only devoid of any ground, but a direct assault by the government on our democratic rights. Under the convenient plea of countering Maoism, the state government has falsely implicated RDF as a frontal organization of CPI (Maoist) – another banned political entity – and has thereby continued with its policy of criminalizing and persecuting political dissent. This is in spite of the fact that upholding of and adhering to any ideology is not a crime but is a constitutionally guaranteed right of the citizens, which has been time and again pointed out by the Supreme Court.

Continuing the colonial legacy of bans, the governments in India have imposed bans, restrictions and censorship on democratic dissent and freedom of expression in the past. The 21 months of Emergency in early 1970s saw a severe clampdown on the right to associate, protest and express disaffection against the government. The same policy was replicated by bringing into force a plethora of draconian laws such as NSA, TADA, POTA, UAPA etc., complimented by equally stringent legislations in different states. For instance, while AP Public Security Act was promulgated in 1992 to proscribe CPI(ML) Peoples' War and several peoples' organizations, Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) was banned under the TADA in 2001 branding it as a 'terrorist' organization just after the attack on the World Trade Centre. Several democratic organizations have been banned during the last decade in AP, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar and Maharashtra after branding them as 'frontal organizations' of the Maoist party. In 2010 the Delhi Police listed a number democratic and civil rights organizations as well as individuals who are allegedly carrying out 'unlawful activities'. This included organizations like APDR, CRPP, PUCL, PUDR, IAPL, RDF, PDFI, DSU, and others. Thus, the politics of branding and banning peoples' organizations have been arbitrarily pursued by the Indian government under different pretexts at different times.

The reasons for banning RDF in Andhra Pradesh as per the Government Order of 9 August 2012 include "Opposing and demanding stoppage of anti extremist combing operations of the police and security forces in the left wing extremism affected area of the States", "Organising dharnas, rallies and other forms of agitations", "Opposing lawful actions of police and criminal justice system", and so on. Such 'charges' go against the very grain of right to political dissent which is constitutionally guaranteed. Such acts of the government which are arbitrary in intent and authoritarian in content can only violate and vitiate the space for political freedom and dissent of the vast sections of the people in a democracy and hence should be opposed. We, the undersigned, therefore strongly oppose the ban imposed on RDF and demand that the Andhra Pradesh government revoke this ban immediately and unconditionally.