

India: 'Heavy-handed' raid on Oxfam India and other major NGOs by authorities in move to silence criticism



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The raids were presented as 'surveys'

'It is alarming how the attack on the rights to freedom of expression and association by the authorities keeps growing unabated every day in India' - Yamini Mishra

Responding to the so-called 'surveys' conducted on Wednesday 7 September by India's Income Tax Department at multiple locations, including Oxfam India, Independent and Public-Spirited Media Foundation (IPSMF) and the Centre for Policy Research, Yamini Mishra, Amnesty International's South Asia Regional Director, said:

"This is yet another blatant example of how the Government's financial and investigative agencies are being weaponised to harass, intimidate, silence, and criminalise independent critical voices in the country. "It is alarming how the attack on the rights to freedom of expression and association by the authorities keeps growing unabated every day in India. "The raids are clearly a heavy-handed attempt by the Government to instil fear among these organisations' staff and funders, and to impose a chilling effect to silence civil society at large. "The Indian authorities must immediately stop these tactics of repression and ensure that civil society organisations are able to operate free from fear of reprisal in the country."

The Income Tax Department of India yesterday raided multiple locations including the two NGOs and public policy think-tank named above as part of a probe investigating alleged contraventions of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act.

This is not the first time that central investigative or financial agencies have raided premises and conducted investigations against civil society organisations. Previously, Amnesty India and Greenpeace India's offices were raided by various central agencies.

The Income Tax Department also previously raided several independent media houses critical of the government, including Newclick, Newslaundry, The Quint, Dainik Bhaskar, and Bharat Samachar.

These raids constitute intrusive scrutiny and burdensome administrative requirements. They are a violation of the rights to association and to privacy protected under international human rights law. Authorities must ensure that any processes undertaken to ensure transparency and accountability from organisations are not arbitrary and are non-discriminatory.

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Press Contacts

1. Press Office

press@amnesty.org

+44 (0) 20 7413 5566

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