

Edinburgh University hosting talk by human rights defender today

Dr Binayak Sen, human rights defender and former political prisoner, will today speak at an event hosted by Edinburgh University on how his attempts to speak out on behalf of the poor led to his conviction on 'trumped up' political charges.

Dr Sen is an internationally acclaimed public health professional who has worked for over three decades with poor, indigenous and other marginalised people on issues of basic livelihood, health services and social justice in Chhattisgarh, one of the poorest states in India. An outspoken defender of the marginalised and dispossessed indigenous people of India, Dr Sen has been a fearless critic of the government and its treatment of its people.

As a result of his human rights work, Dr Sen was arrested under draconian 'anti-terror' laws in 2007 and imprisoned without bail for two years whilst awaiting trial. On Christmas Eve 2010, a local court in Chhattisgarh went on to convict and sentence Dr Sen to life imprisonment on the charge of 'Sedition'. Dr Sen was eventually granted bail by the Supreme Court of India in April 2011. The Scottish Action for the release of Binayak Sen gained momentum in 2008 and Amnesty International declared him a prisoner of conscience, leading a high profile campaign for Dr Sen, including highlighting his case at the 2009 Edinburgh Festival where thousands of Scots

demanded justice for the Indian doctor.

Dr Binayak Sen will talk about his own experiences within the wider context of inequity and dispossession of the indigenous peoples.

Ahead of the event Dr Sen said:

'Communities already affected and debilitated by chronic hunger are being robbed of their access to common property resources that have been essential to their survival. Their survival depends upon their resistance, yet this resistance is being criminalised and dubbed 'sedition'.'

The event will be chaired by Dr. Anuj Kapilashrami, chair of the Scottish Action and Dr. Crispin Bates from the University of Edinburgh and other speakers include Richard Simpson MSP, who was a vocal supporter of Binayak Sen during Amnesty's campaign; and Shabnum Mustapha, Programme Director for [Amnesty International Scotland](#).

Richard Simpson MSP, said:

'As a former GP and former Justice Minister, I supported the campaign for the release of Dr Binayak Sen. The role of a doctor is to help their patients; Dr Sen went further and chose to work with marginalised rural communities who weren't receiving proper healthcare and challenged the discrimination and injustice his patients and their communities were facing

and continue to face. I applaud the work Dr Sen has been doing and congratulate him on receiving the Gandhi Foundation peace award.'

Shabnum Mustapha, Programme Director for Amnesty International Scotland, said:

'I am absolutely delighted that Dr Binayak Sen is visiting Edinburgh – a city which showed its support for his case through the thousands of petitions the public signed. As a former Amnesty Prisoner of Conscience, Dr Sen is a man who has shown immense courage and determination over decades, helping the poorest communities in India for which he was unjustly targeted by the state authorities. India is the world's largest democracy and should be upholding people's human rights. Invidious discrimination and unlawful killings of marginalised communities that Dr Sen was campaigning against must stop. I hope his receiving of the Gandhi Foundation peace award will reinforce that message.'

Dr Sen's visit to Scotland follows his receipt of the Gandhi Foundation International peace award, at the House of Lords earlier this week (Tuesday 12th June).

The event is hosted by the Centre for South Asian Studies and Global Public Health Unit (University of Edinburgh) and supported by the Scottish Action for the release of Binayak Sen, Amnesty Scotland and Scotland Against Criminalising Communities.

Venue – Meeting Room 6, Crystal McMillan Building, 15 George Square, University of Edinburgh **at 4-6p.m**

