

Indian letters on cease-fire between Indian government and the CPI(Maoist)



Swami Agnivesh,
promoter of cease-fire

Letters from P. Chidambaram and CPI(Maoist) to Swami Agnivesh regarding the possibility of dialogue

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[Intro by sanhati.com: Ever since Operation Green Hunt was launched, there have been efforts by different sections of the civil society to enable a dialogue between the Indian government and the CPI(Maoist). Though several unsuccessful attempts for dialogue have been made, what is striking is that different government officials and ministers have continuously dismissed any positive response from the CPI(Maoist), as empty posturing or attempts to gain time for regrouping. In the midst of all this, Operation Green Hunt has of course continued, bringing misery to the lives of the people in the east-central forested regions of the country.

However, recently, a fresh initiative for peace and justice has come forth with attempts by Swami Agnivesh to bring both sides to the negotiation table. In this regard, the Home Minister P. Chidambaram had written a letter to Swami Agnivesh laying down the conditions from the government's side for the talks. Although the letter was supposedly confidential, it was leaked to the press, apparently from the home ministry, to seemingly portray a picture of sincerity on the part of the government.

It turns out that, more than a week back, the CPI (Maoist) had responded to this initiative by writing their own letter to Swami Agnivesh, which described the suitable conditions from their side for joining the talks. However, quite mysteriously, there was no discussion in the media regarding the Maoist response and there were rumours that the government was attempting to suppress it. With apprehensions that this initiative would also lose steam, the CPI (Maoist) letter has also now reached different sections of the media.

From the very inception of Operation Green Hunt, we have been continuously involved in various initiatives to end the armed offensive by the state. We have also tried to provide a platform for discussions regarding the possible negotiations between the State and CPI(Maoist).

In continuation of this process, we are publishing here the two letters (i) written by the Home Minister to Swami Agnivesh (ii) written by the CPI(Maoist) representative to Swami Agnivesh, so that there is clarity regarding the issues involved in beginning the dialogue between the two sides. — Ed]

Letter from Azad, spokesperson of CPI(Maoist), to Swami Agnivesh

May 31, 2010

Regarding the proposal for talks made by Mr. P. Chidambaram in his letter to Swami Agnivesh

Dear Swami Agniveshji,

We heard that you and other democratic intellectuals had gone on a peace march in Dantewada in the first week of May 2010 braving the disruption organized by the goons of the BJP and Congress. You might have realized how the state government and the Centre are determined to sabotage any attempt to bring peace to the region and to prevent anyone from making efforts in that direction. We appreciate the efforts of well-meaning intellectuals and social activists like you to bring peace to the region. We also appreciate the efforts made by you to convince the Union Government to come forward for a cease-fire and dialogue with our Party which had prompted the Union Home Minister to state the Government's position on the issue.

We had gone through the letter written to you by the Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram dated May 11, 2010 which mentions the Government's position on the peace process and its offer for talks with the CPI(Maoist). The essence of his letter is that "the CPI(Maoist) should announce they will abjure violence" and specify a date from which they will not indulge in violent activities; should "stop all violent activities" from that date for 72 hours, and that the security forces will not conduct any operations against the CPI(Maoist); that "talks" would begin "sometime during the period of 72 hours when there is no violence"; and that the CPI(Maoist) should "continue to maintain its position of no violence until the talks are concluded."

We had already stated publicly our Party's position on cease-fire and talks with the government several times in the past. We wish to reiterate our Party's position once again in light of the proposals made by Mr. Chidambaram in his letter sent to you.

Firstly we hold the opinion that the cease-fire should be mutual. You are well aware of the continuous persecution of ordinary innocent people by the security forces in all the regions where the latter are deployed as part of the Operation Green Hunt. Not a day passes without an incident of murder, rape, abduction, torture of the adivasis and destruction of their property or stealing their belongings by these so-called security forces. How can the people or the Party and

its various wings get confidence that the Government is serious in its intent for peace when it allows its forces to indulge in heinous atrocities on innocent unarmed people, when the government itself allows the suspension of all basic democratic rights of the citizens and consigns their own Constitution to the dust-bin? In such a situation it is necessary on the part of the government to prove its seriousness regarding the peace process by first halting its operations against innocent unarmed people and unequivocally stating that it is ready to observe cease-fire simultaneously with the CPI(Maoist) starting with a specified date. The practical measure to really ensure peace is the declaration of mutual cease-fire for a definite period, say, 2 or 3 months, to start with. Insisting that the CPI(Maoist) should declare that it will abjure violence is an unsound and unreasonable proposal. It implies that the Maoists are indulging in violence while the Government and its security forces have been fighting for peace. The facts actually are vice versa.

It is the paramilitary, police, private vigilante gangs sponsored by the government that are unleashing violence on the people on an hourly basis and the people are compelled to retaliate for their own survival. The Party and the PLGA too are compelled to undertake counter-offensive operations in their self-defence and in defence of the people. Hence it is the Government that has to instill confidence among the people and the Party cadres about its seriousness by first halting its offensive operations and attacks on the people instead of asking the Maoists to unilaterally declare that they will abjure violence.

Even more amusing is the time period of 72 hours which means just nothing. Such a short period cannot prove the seriousness on either side. Even a minor incident on either side can be picked up to prove the violation by the other side. A relatively longer period is necessary if we wish to really bring peace. It is only after a period of peace and the creation of a conducive atmosphere that talks can be held. Our Party is very serious about bringing about peace especially at the present juncture when lakhs of adivasis had fled, and are fleeing, their homes; when lakhs of adivasis are facing chronic conditions of hunger and famine due to their ouster from their lands and forcible closure of the weekly bazaars by the police and administration; when the adivasis are haunted by the threat of death any day by the most savage paramilitary, police, SPOs and private vigilante gangs. One should not be swayed by victories and defeats at this critical juncture in the life of the adivasi community in our country but try to create conditions whereby their survival is ensured.

You are also aware of the difficulties involved for an underground party that is proscribed by the government to proceed for talks. Hence we had proposed the release of political prisoners from the jails. At the outset the Government can take the initiative to release at least some of our Party leaders so as to facilitate talks with them. Without referring to any of these proposals made by our Party, Mr. Chidambaram proposes that “talks will begin sometime during the period of 72 hours when there is no violence.” He also says that he expects that the CPI(Maoist) will “continue to maintain its position of ‘no violence’ until the talks are concluded.”

The above-mentioned proposal by Mr. Chidambaram, though it might appear apparently as genuine, actually lacks seriousness and is intended only to satisfy people like you who have been insisting on peace. His insistence on a 72-hour-period of peace on the part of the CPI (Maoist) and to hold talks during this period is like a joke. It only shows how Mr. Chidambaram lacks

seriousness on the issue and wants to somehow complete the formality of talks, if at all they materialize, in order to satisfy the civil society. If the government is serious it should speak in terms of mutual cease-fire, for a longer period of time, and spell out the government's stand on fulfilling the minimum requisites like release of leaders and lifting the ban on the CPI(Maoist) and the mass organisations. Its duplicity is also seen in its hectic preparations for stepping up its brutal armed offensive even as it speaks the language of peace and talks. Do you really believe that Mr. Chidambaram is earnest in proposing for talks when there are reports of how the central government is equipping its forces with several more choppers and preparing the Indian Army too for the war on people?

To sum up, our Party desires peace sincerely in the interests of the lakhs of adivasis who are being cruelly crushed under the jack-boots of the forces sent by the Indian State and the people of our country at large. However, to ensure the establishment of peace there should be cease-fire or cessation of hostilities by both sides simultaneously instead of asking one side to abjure violence. If the government is really serious about reducing levels of violence then it should immediately lift the ban on the party and mass organisations so as to facilitate them to take up open forms of struggle. If the government is serious about holding talks it should initiate measures to release Party leaders as a prelude to the release of political prisoners and most importantly, it should stop all its efforts to escalate the war including the measure of calling back all the paramilitary forces deployed in the war zones.

Once again we appreciate the efforts made by you and many others who earnestly desire to bring peace.

We hope that you will pursue your mission of bringing peace taking into consideration the suggestions mentioned by us in this letter. We look forward to positive results for your well-meaning efforts.

With regards,

Azad,
Spokesperson,
Central Committee,
CPI (Maoist)

Letter from the Home Minister, P. Chidambaram, to Swami Agnivesh

May 11, 2010

Dear Swami Agniveshji,

I learned that you led a group of social activists on a peace march from Raipur to Dantewada between May 6-8 2010. I have also learned that you advocated a cessation of violence for 72 hrs

“by either side before continuing the peace process”. I congratulate you and thank you for your efforts.

While I respect your views and urge you to continue to help find a solution, I would like to clarify the Government’s position for your kind consideration :

(1) The CPI(Maoist) should announce that they will abjure violence. To start with, they could say that they will not indulge in any violent activities beginning a specific date, say, June 1 2010. (This is only an example and it could be an earlier date too.)

(2) Once the announcement is made, the Central Government will consult the Chief Ministers of the affected States and prepare a response well before the specified date. The response will include an invitation to the CPI(Maoist) to hold talks.

(3) On the specified date (say, June 1), we would expect that the CPI(Maoist) will stop all violent activities. We would closely observe whether the CPI(Maoist) will maintain the position of “no violence” for 72 hours. It goes without saying that, during the said period of 72 hours, the security forces will not conduct any operations against the CPI(Maoist).

(4) It is our hope that talks will begin during the period of 72 hours when there is “no violence”.

(5) Once the talk begins, we would expect that the CPI(Maoist) will continue to maintain its position of “no violence” until the talks are concluded.

I would appreciate if you could kindly keep the contents of this letter confidential. This is in line with what I told you when you met me a few days ago. However, I would encourage you to reach out to the CPI(Maoist) and persuade them to accept the Government’s offer for talks, the sole condition being that the CPI(Maoist) should abjure violence.

With regards,
Yours sincerely
Sd/- P. Chidambaram
Home Minister
New Delhi, India