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INDIA | Journalist, Rights Activist Killed

Gauri Lankesh, a senior journalist and activist, was shot dead by three unidentified assailants outside her home in Rajarajeshwari Nagar, Bengaluru on Sept. 5. Lankesh was the Editor of Gauri Lankesh Patrike, a weekly tabloid, and was an outspoken human rights activist.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "Our thoughts and prayers are with the relatives and friends of Ms. Lankesh. We condemn this senseless killing, which is also an attack on the values that Ms. Lankesh defended, in particular the right to freedom of expression. We urge the government to prosecute those responsible for her death and end the culture of impunity that has seen the murders of other journalists and activists such as Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare and M.M Kalburgi go unsolved."

Freedom of expression has been declining in India as influence from groups espousing Hindutva ideology has grown. Critics of right-wing views have been confronted with harassment, violence and legal prosecution, which led many publishers and writers to self-censor for fear of backlash from fundamentalist groups.

Veteran human rights activist, Shabnam Hashmi, said, "Death and threats of death have become a common factor for advocates of free speech and conscience. Gauri Lankesh's murder is another attempt to silence dissent by the sangh parivar. Gauri was a strong voice against the Hindu right-wing politics and constantly spoke and wrote against the blatant attacks on freedom of expression, minorities, mob lynching by the sangh organizations."

Thomas added, "We call on the Indian government to combat the atmosphere of fear that is being created by Hindu fundamentalist groups, who are increasingly empowered by the lack of official condemnation of their acts of intimidation and violence."