

# THE HINDU

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## Activists demand notification of Tribal Act

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— Photo: V. V. Krishnan



**VOICING THEIR DEMAND:** Tribals and forest-dwellers form a human chain outside the Tribal Ministry at the Shastri Bhavan in New Delhi in protest against the delay in implementing the Forest Rights Act.

NEW DELHI: Civil society activists and representatives of non-governmental organisations championing the cause of indigenous people on Friday organised a human chain in the capital to press the government to notify the Rules for the Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.

In a memorandum to Union Tribal Affairs Minister P.R. Kyndiah, the activists condemned the continued 'delay' and 'undermining' of the Act passed by Parliament last year.

Drawing the Minister's attention to the fact that the period for receiving public comments ended on August 3 and while the implementation of the Act was being delayed, evictions were taking place across the country in Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu, Orissa and Rajasthan, the protestors accused the Ministry of Environment and Forests of beginning an "illegal process" of determining the critical wildlife habitats — a category created by this law, even before the Act was notified or people's rights recognised.

This violated the letter and spirit of the Act and clearly an effort to 'delay and undermine this law,' the memorandum said.

Moreover, this 'sabotage' of the Act was leading to a situation where its real shortcomings were being ignored. The assurances given to the Rajya Sabha on December 18, 2006 about amendments to the law and measures in the Rules — intended to address these shortcomings remained unimplemented. Rather than continuing to 'undermine' this law, surely it should be the government's effort to fulfil the assurances and implement the law at the earliest, the memorandum said.

If the United Progressive Alliance government's claimed commitment to the country's forest dwelling communities was not merely an empty promise, it was imperative that action be taken to ensure the 'just and effective' recognition of forest rights, it said.

Organised by the Campaign for Survival and Dignity, the protesters demanded that the government empower the communities to defend and protect the forests against mafias, the government and companies and ensure the authority and effectiveness of the real gram sabhas in determining rights.

They also demanded an end to "militarisation" and corporate seizure of tribal land in the name of Special Economic Zones as also bringing all Adivasi areas under the V Schedule.

<http://www.hindu.com/2007/12/01/stories/2007120155841500.htm>