

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) welcomes an intervention by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in India to order appropriate restitution to a journalist in the state of Uttar Pradesh, for prolonged harassment and intimidation suffered at the hands of local police. According to the findings of the NHRC, published on February 11, Samiuddin, alias Nilu, a reporter for the Hindi daily Amar Ujala in Lakhimpur Kheri district of Uttar Pradesh, was at various times since 2004 threatened by local police, allegedly on the orders of the district police superintendent. His troubles began after he filed a series of reports documenting arbitrary actions and harassment of innocent people by the local police.

On May 5, 2006, Samiuddin was snatched while on his way home after work, by persons believed to be policemen of a special operations group.

The incident, according to the NHRC, could have had fatal consequences but for Samiuddin's precaution in registering a complaint to the NHRC apprehending a threat to his life. Once informed that the matter was under consideration of the national oversight body, local police reportedly let Samiuddin off.

The NHRC has ruled that Samiuddin's case is an "extraordinary" one since it involves a journalist exercising his right to report and inform. In the circumstances, it has ordered that the state authorities in Uttar Pradesh should pay damages of INR 500,000 (USD 10,850) to Samiuddin and file a compliance report within six weeks.

In another important move, the Press Council of India (PCI) has heard Samiuddin's case and called for state authorities to submit six-monthly reports on his security for the next five years.

The PCI, which inquired into the matter through its own processes, described Samiuddin's as "a rare case that calls for serious attention".

"The IFJ welcomes these findings by India's human rights body and its press freedom watchdog and hope that these will set a precedent for all future such cases involving the harassment of journalists who report fearlessly on the misdeeds of those in authority," IFJ Asia-Pacific Director Jacqueline Park said.

Press Release: International Federation of Journalists