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Date: 02/10/2007

To,  
Shri A K Antony  
Hon'ble Defence Minister  
104 South Block,  
New Delhi - 110001

Sub: - Soldiers - Killing silence of life on the edge.

Dear Sir,

Ours is a registered and recognized non-profitable, multi-dimensional, social organization working for the consumer protection, fighting for justice, creating awareness against injustice and or other noble causes.

In the recent times, we have been flooded with reports of subordinate soldiers and security staff making a violent attack on their superior officers. Most of these cases happen in circumstances of difficult postings and subsequently some cosmetic measures will be taken to quell such irregularities from repeating. A detailed socio-psychological investigation into why this kind of incidents keep happening often has never been made. And naturally, the incidents repeat with some regularity and keep the debate afresh. In the year 2006 alone, the cases of fragging were 23. But this statistic does not speak of everything. There are cases that are not reported properly, hidden away for the fear of media or attributed to different causes in order to keep the numbers low. Soon, the South Block should realize that it is not the number that is important, but the real reasons behind such a growing concern. Militaries of other nations have realized this problem long ago and have tackled the situation effectively.

First of all, it is important to distinguish 'difficult' from 'un-natural' while characterizing the circumstances in which these so called 'disorders' occur. Most of these cases occur in places like permanently frozen Siachen, terrorist infested Kashmir, highly remote north east or in circumstances of gross ignorance towards basic humanitarian issues. Many times, a combination of above reasons accumulates and results in such events. In recent days, we have seen soldiers involved in sexual assault, killing their superiors and maiming their peers. Some have committed suicide in frustration. Many have left the forces and gone back to civilian life. The armed forces have always said that they are short of over 14,000 officers and 20,000 lower ranking personnel. It now appears that joining the army is the last option to our young people when nothing else is available. Therefore, it is important that we carefully address these **aberrations** as human issues rather than service conditions and bring about radical improvements in the circumstances that abet such heinous incidents.

In the case of the military, the contrast of living conditions between the superior and subordinate is very drastic. The lowly soldiers are made to take orders at office, home and even from the housewives and children of officers, thereby reducing the dignity of soldier. The subordinate employees see the seniors living a normal life with their families while they slog alone on extended missions without a similar arrangement to address their familial, personal and biological needs. At the same time, they are also hardened by the philosophy of 'attack', 'kill', 'destroy' and 'capture', which the Military professes as part

of its 'duty'. There are no prizes to guess that inhuman subordination in combination with an extraordinary 'brain-wash' of war philosophy has an effect of easy recourse to violence. Therefore, be it military or Paramilitary forces or police, the culture of professional service is a heady mix of improbable philosophies. The subordinates are ill treated. Now, how much time does it take for the circumstances to recoil irresponsibly? It is like the story of the circus elephant that throws its trainer and tramples the audience in disgust because it has been ill treated and starved. In Kerala, on an average a dozen mahouts are killed by their own elephants every year. **Mutiny is the natural recourse of every oppression.**

We need to realize that we no longer live in the times of Alexander the Great. Alexander, over 2300 years ago, led an army of thousands of soldiers over a time span of a decade and roamed them on the most inhospitable terrains of this planet. He had no modern mode of transportation, communication and entertainment in his operations unlike the access of every modern method from satellites to helicopters to which our military is privy. We don't need to keep our soldiers in the circumstances in which Alexander the Great kept his army. The pent up pressures of work and circumstantial stress of unnatural postings are such that even Alexander the Great in his exalted position of emperor-ship, committed human violence on his own colleagues at times. The reverse process of his subordinates trying to harm and kill him has also been widely described in the history and it is often said that every military commander in the world reads about Alexander's life and times to draw strategies for his career. One needs to learn from his human follies as well.

Providing just a few more holidays and some nominal increase of pay to our soldiers posted in difficult conditions may not fully answer all the questions. We need not soften their fighting spirit but we need to humanize their circumstances. Providing the pleasure of families, even in their remote postings, is easily possible today and we ought to believe that it will only increase the confidence and the sense of purpose in them rather than distracting their focus and attention. At the same time, a complete review of the disparity of living conditions between seniors and their subordinates is necessary. This cannot be done by the Military Generals alone, but will have to be done by a panel comprising of sociologists, psychologists, soldiers, planners, technologists and lawyers knowledgeable of human rights as well as the requirements of duty. We will need to rationalize the service conditions and humanize the Indian army.

Although we do not know for certainty the living conditions of present day armies that are posted in very unusual circumstances, we can recognize the elements of inspiration in the news that trickle out of Iraq. Visit of the families, frequent visit of soldiers to their families, minimizing the disparity of living conditions between seniors and juniors, morale boosting visits of high officials including the President, enormous infrastructure for entertainment in the military camps, introduction of high technology in communication & transport, encouraging the soldiers to frequently communicate with their families are a few example of modern thinking that keep the people bonded to their shared vision and purpose in places that are otherwise extremely stressful. Infusing technology into service is very important. We are in an age of tele-communications and are priding ourselves by tele-education and tele-medicine kind of programmes that we take to remote and forlorn areas. It is no more difficult to set up tele conferencing of soldiers in remote areas with their families on a regular basis.

It is also important to note that the fragging as a process is not commonplace in navy and the air force. The main reason for this is that the postings of airmen and seamen are never as remote and difficult as that of army soldiers. Also, their jobs provides them with better living conditions than to the soldiers of the army.

It is high time that India thought of these things in a purposeful manner by involving civilian wisdom to mitigate the problems that have haunted our military. After all, accepting to die in the war field is only a way of expressing that the soldier wants to live, be employed and provide happiness to himself and his family. He is there in the battlefield not for the glory of sacrifice but with the responsibility of taking care of his dearest ones who are left behind. It is not a personal mission, but a profession that allows him to earn bread for those at home. Complete segregation, imposition of torturous life and hammering down a philosophy of sacrifice are all the devices adopted by outfits that breed and bring up terrorists. We should recognize this factor while dealing with the soldiers.

In the light of above, we humbly suggest following actions to solve this problem.

1. Perform a thorough investigation on sexuality, sexual deprivation and sexual abuse that plague the military at different levels and in different task locations to arrive at useful recommendations on how to address the problem of sex related frustration, depression, aggression and crime.
2. Appoint a technical committee to review the technologies of communication that can be interfaced with service in difficult terrains and to recommend the access of such technology by ordinary soldiers to keep in touch with their families.
3. Bring about radical changes in remuneration and reward schemes for soldiers on special assignments.
4. Increase home travel frequency of soldiers assigned to demanding tasks and reduce the length of continuous stay.
5. Increase normal human interaction for soldiers and officers posted on difficult tasks.
6. Re-educate senior officers on inter-personal relationships.
7. Arrange for periodical counseling of soldiers assigned to difficult tasks through psychologists and sociologists.
8. Perform psychological pre-scanning of soldiers and officers who are to be assigned for difficult tasks.

We look forward for your positive response.

Thanking you,

Yours faithfully,

**For National Council for Civil Liberties**

**V K SAXENA  
PRESIDENT**

**c c: Gen. Deepak Kapoor, Hon'ble Chief of Army Staff, Army Head Quarters – New Delhi.**

