

EU RAISES CONCERNS OVER ACTION AGAINST AMNESTY

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Role of NGOs, SHGs, Donors & Charities, and Institutional & other Stakeholders in Development Process

A view of the Amnesty International office at Indiranagar in Bengaluru on Saturday. K. Murali Kumar. Murali Kumar

Expressing “concerns” about the government’s investigation into Amnesty International (AI), the European Union said it hopes the global human rights agency can continue its work in India.

However, the government defended its actions, and said AI is in “clear contravention” of Indian law.

The action against AI including freezing their funds, followed a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) inquiry, and is part of the government’s scrutiny of more than 20 international NGOs including Greenpeace, Compassion International, and Ford Foundation, over the past few years.

“We have already raised the issue with our Indian interlocutors in New Delhi and in Brussels, expressing our concerns and the expectation that these issues will be solved, and we will continue to do so,” EU spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security policy Nabila Massrali said, in a response to *The Hindu* .

“Not prejudging the outcome of any investigation or judicial proceedings, the European Union highly values the work of Amnesty International worldwide and hopes that the matter will be resolved, allowing Amnesty to continue its activities in India without interruption,” she said.

The Ministry of External Affairs declined to comment on the EU’s comments.

However, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued a broad defence of actions by various agencies against AI for the past decade, calling it a “bipartisan and purely legal approach towards Amnesty”, which has now suspended its India operations, claiming a “witch-hunt” by the government.

“In order to circumvent the FCRA regulations, Amnesty UK remitted large amounts of money to four entities registered in India, by classifying it as Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). A significant amount of foreign money was also remitted to Amnesty (India) without MHA’s approval under FCRA. This malafide rerouting of money was in contravention of extant legal provisions,” said the MHA in a rare public statement on the NGO entitled “Human Rights cannot be an excuse for defying the law of the land”.

“India, by settled law, does not allow interference in domestic political debates by entities funded by foreign donations,” the MHA added, in a reference to AI’s reports on alleged human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir, and its reference to Delhi Police investigations into the February riots where 53 people were killed.

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