

Press Statement from SC/ST Faculty Forum and Concerned Faculty, UoH

We write this statement in a mood of utter disbelief and anguish at the turn of events at the University of Hyderabad today on 6th April 2016. We would like to bring to your notice that the 76th Academic Council Meeting was conducted today at the University in a highly irregular manner, in direct violation of all norms of propriety and official procedure. First of all, in an unprecedented move, the venue was changed from the Life Sciences Auditorium to the VC's Lodge at the last minute, i.e., on the late afternoon of 5th April 2016. On the morning of 06.04.16, there was heavy police deployment on the campus, especially on the road leading up to the VC's residence. While students of the University of Hyderabad have always been allowed to protest outside the venue of the AC meeting, on this occasion, the terror-inspiring presence of the police force and RAF was intended to ensure that they did not reach the venue. As a banner of the police read, "The gathering at this place is identified as unlawful assembly. You are advised to vacate this place immediately. If not police will take action as per law." We may mention that hundreds of people—activists, intellectuals and political figures—on their way to the University of Hyderabad in response to the *Chalo HCU* call given by the Joint Action Committee of Students (JAC), were lathicharged and arrested en route.

In a significant development, Prof. V. Krishna who is the Controller of Examinations, and the Convener of the AC, walked out of the venue after declaring his unwillingness to convene an AC meeting in current conditions of repression and disregard for norms. Such a gesture of protest by a CE is unprecedented and exceptional. Yet, the VC chose to continue with the meeting.

Coming to the conduct of the Academic Council itself, a large number of faculty chose to stay away from the meeting as a mark of protest. An eminent professor from the Social Sciences wrote a mail to the VC on the eve of the AC meeting: "Excuse me for not attending the long-delayed Academic Council (AC) meeting, being now convened finally on 6 April 2016. You certainly have the power to do so, but not quite the authority." A significant number of faculty wrote endorsing and adding to the spirit of this letter.

A set of faculty did go to the AC meeting but left after registering their strong protest. They drew attention to the brutal police action of 22 March 2016 as also the police presence on campus on the day of AC itself. They said that they could not sit through the proceedings of the AC under such conditions.

A group of faculty members chose to stay back in the meeting and convey their protest with respect to the proceedings and unfortunate events on campus. A senior and distinguished faculty member reminded Prof. Appa Rao about how he had chosen to leave an academic community in distress in the days following the passing of Rohith Vemula. How could he then simply come back and chair the AC? This group of faculty drafted and read out a letter unequivocally protesting against the choice of venue and the deployment of police force on campus.

Renowned sociologist and public intellectual, Nandini Sundar, a professor at Delhi University and an external member of the AC, posed hard questions relating to issues since Rohith's death and to police and administrative actions after Prof. Appa Rao's resumed office on 22nd March. Significantly, she said that while there was an item on the agenda with respect to identifying malpractices in exams and the requisite punishments, there were charges of plagiarism against the VC himself. Under the circumstances, it was not possible for her to accept his chairing even though she would sit through the meeting as she respected the University of Hyderabad and its faculty.

Finally, a large number of faculty—well respected and committed members of the academia—conveyed their dismay regarding the atmosphere of intimidation and surveillance that the University has plunged into in recent days, mirroring a state of emergency and a community under siege.