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To,

Shri S. Chockalingam

The Chief Electoral Officer,

Maharashtra State Election Commission

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Subject: Urgent intervention regarding the unauthorised possession and photocopying of SIR Enumeration Forms in Kharghar and the integrity of the electoral-roll revision process

Respected Sir,

We, at Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP), Vote for Democracy. The Bombay Catholic Sabha, several human rights and citizens organisations are extremely concerned with recent media videos and newspaper reports, regarding the discovery of 3,404 original SIR Enumeration Forms at a private photocopying centre in Sector 19, Kharghar, on August 27, 2026. The incident raises grave questions about the security of electoral records, the chain of custody of voter information, administrative accountability and, ultimately, public confidence in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Maharashtra.

According to reports, the forms recovered at the premises were genuine election documents relating to multiple polling stations within the 188-Panvel Assembly Constituency. An FIR has reportedly been registered against a person identified as Suraj Patil, while five Booth Level Officers have been suspended and a departmental inquiry has been initiated.

Collectively, CJP and other organisations urgently requests and welcomes immediate action where warranted. However, the seriousness of this incident requires that the matter not be reduced to the suspension of individual BLOs or treated as an isolated administrative lapse.

The State Election Commission must establish precisely how thousands of original electoral documents came to be outside official custody and were being reproduced at a private commercial establishment.

This matter is particularly concerning given the fact that Maharashtra's draft electoral roll has seen a significant reduction, with over 2.06 crore electors, or 21.14 per cent of the previous voter base, excluded following a Special Intensive Revision (SIR)! While the ostensible official explanations have given the reasons as “voters being being untraceable or having shifted residences”, given the recent shocking Kharghar exposes, suspicion grows that not just the 3,000-odd but also many more *genuine voters have been deliberately and vicariously excluded due to political interference*. The Election Commission of India (ECI) is a Constitutional Body and needs to not simply act impartially but also act without fear or favour: this trust and faith in the ECI has been shattered by these recent exposes.

The Kharghar incident raises a fundamental question of electoral integrity

SIR Enumeration Forms are generated and collected as part of an official electoral process. They contain voter-related information and are entrusted to the election machinery for a specific statutory purpose. Their movement and custody must therefore be subject to clear safeguards and accountability. The discovery of 3,404 original forms together at a private photocopying centre indicates a significant failure of those safeguards.

The explanation that the forms may have been required for verification by BLOs does not, by itself, answer the central question: who authorised the removal of these original documents from official custody, why were they taken to a private establishment, and who authorised their reproduction?

The fact that the forms reportedly related to 11 polling stations makes it particularly important to establish whether this was an isolated act by one or more individuals or whether there was a broader breakdown in the system through which SIR documents were being handled.

The reported political connection makes an independent factual inquiry essential

Public reporting has identified the person allegedly found handling the forms as a BJP functionary. Political allegations surrounding the incident have understandably intensified public concern. CJP does not suggest that political affiliation, in itself, establishes culpability. The facts must be determined through an impartial investigation.

At the same time, the political dimension cannot simply be disregarded. If a political functionary had unauthorised access to original voter documentation, the Election Commission must establish how that access occurred and whether any official or intermediary facilitated it. The issue is therefore not one of attributing guilt by association. It is one of determining whether political actors obtained access to voter information outside the safeguards governing the electoral process. A credible inquiry must answer this question transparently.

The chain of custody must be reconstructed in full

The suspension of five BLOs indicates that the administration has identified serious concerns regarding the handling of the forms. However, responsibility must be established on the basis of the entire chain of events. The inquiry must reconstruct the movement of the forms from the point at which they were collected from electors to the point at which they were recovered at the Kharghar premises.

This requires establishing who collected the forms, who retained them, who transported them, who authorised their movement, who delivered them to the photocopying centre and who requested or carried out their reproduction. If responsibility extends beyond the suspended BLOs, the inquiry must follow the evidence wherever it leads, including to supervisory and administrative levels.

The security of voter information requires particular scrutiny

The incident is not merely about physical forms. It concerns the information contained within them. The Commission must establish whether the documents were merely photocopied or whether they were also scanned, photographed, digitally stored, transmitted or otherwise reproduced. Any computers, scanners, photocopiers, storage devices and other equipment used in the process should be examined as part of the investigation.

This is essential because once voter-level information leaves the controlled environment of the election machinery, the risk is not confined to the physical documents themselves. Unauthorised copies can potentially be retained or disseminated beyond the Commission's knowledge. The public is entitled to assurance that information provided to the State for the purpose of exercising the franchise has not been diverted for any other purpose.

The scale of exclusion from the draft roll makes this incident even more serious

The Kharghar incident must also be considered against the broader context of the SIR exercise. The Chief Electoral Officer has stated that approximately 2.07 crore Enumeration Forms have been classified as uncollectable, including categories such as absent/not found, permanently shifted, deceased, duplicate or already enrolled elsewhere.

We recognise the Commission's position that an "uncollectable" form does not automatically mean that an elector has been permanently deleted and that the draft roll remains subject to claims and objections. Nevertheless, the magnitude of the figure makes the reliability of the entire verification process a matter of exceptional public importance.

When millions of electors are presently absent from the draft roll, the public must have confidence that the underlying forms were collected, handled, verified and processed through a system that was secure, impartial and capable of independent scrutiny. The Kharghar incident directly affects that confidence.

It is therefore not sufficient to view the incident as a discrete breach concerning a few thousand documents. The Commission must determine whether the weaknesses revealed in Kharghar could exist elsewhere and whether similar instances of unauthorised access or mishandling occurred during the SIR exercise.

The claims and objections process must be capable of correcting administrative error

The Commission has correctly emphasised that the draft roll is not the final electoral roll and that electors whose names are missing may seek inclusion or correction. However, the existence of a remedy on paper is not enough. The process must be practically accessible to every eligible elector, particularly those who may not even know that their names have been omitted.

The categories used to classify uncollectable forms also require careful scrutiny. A person marked as absent may have been temporarily away from home. A person classified as shifted

may dispute having moved. A person categorised as deceased or duplicate may have been incorrectly identified.

Given the scale of exclusions, the Commission must ensure that claims and objections are examined individually and fairly, with adequate staffing, clear procedures and meaningful opportunities for affected electors to establish their eligibility. The final electoral roll must not reproduce administrative errors merely because those errors entered the system at an earlier stage.

Kharghar must trigger a wider audit, not merely a local inquiry

The most important institutional lesson from Kharghar is the need to determine whether the incident was exceptional or symptomatic of a wider vulnerability. A state-wide exercise involving millions of electors cannot rely upon informal or inconsistent arrangements for handling original documents. The Commission must have a clear, uniform and auditable chain of custody for all SIR material.

The Kharghar incident therefore warrants a broader review of how Enumeration Forms have been stored, transported, accessed and reproduced across Maharashtra. The objective should not be to prejudge the outcome of any investigation. It should be to ensure that a failure identified in one location is not permitted to remain a vulnerability elsewhere.

Transparency must accompany accountability

Public confidence cannot be restored through administrative action alone. The Commission must also communicate clearly what happened and what has been done to prevent its recurrence. A credible institutional response requires the facts of the Kharghar incident to be established through an impartial inquiry and its findings to be made public, subject only to legitimate restrictions necessary to protect personal information or an ongoing criminal investigation. The public should not be left to choose between competing political narratives. The Election Commission has both the authority and the responsibility to establish the facts.

In view of the above, CJP calls upon the Chief Electoral Officer, Maharashtra, to:

1. Ensure a time-bound, impartial and comprehensive investigation into the Kharghar incident involving the 3,404 SIR Enumeration Forms.
2. Examine all physical and digital reproductions of the forms and preserve relevant CCTV footage, electronic records and equipment necessary to determine whether voter information was further copied, stored or transmitted.
3. Extend the inquiry beyond the five suspended BLOs wherever the evidence indicates supervisory or administrative responsibility.
4. Conduct a state-wide audit of the custody and handling of SIR Enumeration Forms to determine whether similar instances of unauthorised possession, reproduction or removal have occurred elsewhere.

5. Strengthen and publicly disclose uniform safeguards governing the custody, movement, reproduction, storage and disposal of SIR Enumeration Forms.

The Kharghar incident is serious because it concerns more than the improper handling of a set of government documents. It concerns the integrity of the machinery through which citizens are recognised as electors.

The discovery of 3,404 original SIR Enumeration Forms at a private photocopying centre, coupled with the reported political connection of the person found with them and the subsequent suspension of five BLOs, demands a full accounting of how those documents travelled outside the official chain of custody.

That concern is magnified by the fact that the SIR exercise has resulted in approximately 2.07 crore Enumeration Forms being classified as uncollectable at the draft stage. While the Commission has clarified that this classification is not synonymous with permanent deletion, the scale of the exclusions makes it imperative that every stage of the process be demonstrably reliable.

Electoral legitimacy depends not only on the conduct of polling but also on the integrity of the electoral roll from which the right to vote flows. The Election Commission must therefore demonstrate, through facts, investigation and transparent corrective action, that the SIR process is insulated from unauthorised access, administrative negligence and partisan interference.

CJP, VFD, BCS all urge that the Chief Electoral Officer to treat the Kharghar episode as an institutional matter concerning the integrity of Maharashtra's electoral process and to take immediate steps to ensure that no eligible citizen's democratic right is compromised by failures in the preparation, custody or verification of the electoral roll.

Yours sincerely,

Teesta Setalvad, CJP Secretary

Dolphy D'Souza, Spokesperson, The Bombay Catholic Sabha

Father Frazer Mascarenhas, Vote for Democracy