

## Stan Swamy Memorial Lecture Canceled in Mumbai

August 18, 2025

— Categories: Human Rights



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Mumbai's St. Xavier's College canceled its annual Stan Swamy Memorial Lecture on August 9, 2025, following objections from the student organization Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP). The lecture, which was to be delivered virtually by Jesuit scholar Fr. Prem Xalxo on "Migration for Livelihood: Hope Amidst Miseries," was intended to honor the late Jesuit priest and activist Stan Swamy.

Fr. Stan Swamy, 84, was arrested in October 2020 under India's Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) in connection with the 2018 Bhima Koregaon case. Authorities accused him of links to a banned organization, but he was never convicted. Swamy died in July 2021 while in custody, during which he had repeatedly requested medical bail. He had spent decades advocating for Adivasi communities in Jharkhand, focusing on land rights, displacement issues, and documenting cases of illegal detention. International rights groups and legal experts criticized his arrest and death, citing concerns about due process and the treatment of elderly activists.

The ABVP, a student group affiliated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), objected to the lecture, describing the memorialization of Fr. Swamy as "anti-national." In a letter to the college administration, ABVP leaders requested the cancellation, citing ideological concerns. The college administration, citing "unavoidable circumstances," chose to cancel the event.

The cancellation has drawn attention from human rights advocates and academics, who view it as part of a broader concern over restrictions on dissent in India. Critics argue that incidents such as this highlight challenges faced by educational institutions in balancing academic freedom with political pressures. St. Xavier's College, known for its Jesuit educational tradition, has long promoted social justice and critical inquiry. The decision to cancel the lecture raises questions about the protection of free expression within academic settings.

The Bhima Koregaon case continues to be closely watched. Sixteen activists remain in detention, and some reports indicate that digital evidence against several accused may have been compromised. Human rights organizations emphasize that the UAPA allows prolonged detention with a low conviction rate, leading to concerns over due process and fair trial rights.

Swamy's advocacy focused on nonviolent efforts to support marginalized communities, documenting injustices and challenging policies affecting Adivasi populations. His work included legal support, community engagement, and public awareness campaigns. Supporters highlight that framing his activities as criminal remains unproven in court.

The lecture's cancellation underscores ongoing tensions between student activism, institutional decision-making, and the space for civil discourse in India. International

observers and rights groups continue to monitor such developments, emphasizing the importance of safeguarding academic and civic freedoms.

The case has prompted broader discussions on the treatment of human rights defenders, the role of educational institutions in promoting critical thinking, and the balance between legal enforcement and civil liberties.