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## FOREST RIGHTS

# Supreme Court orders eviction of more than 10 lakh Adivasi and forest-dwelling families

The court said those families whose claims over traditional forestlands were rejected under the Forest Rights Act should be evicted.

**Scroll Staff**

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Reuters

The Supreme Court has ordered the eviction of more than 10 lakh families of Adivasis and other forest-dwellers from forestlands across 16 states.

The order came after the top court heard petitions challenging the validity of the [Forest Rights Act](#) on February 13. The petitioners had demanded that those whose claims over traditional forestlands are rejected under the new law should be evicted. The Centre's lawyer was missing from the hearing on that day, alleged the [Campaign for Survival and Dignity](#), a group of several adivasi and forest dwellers' movements.

The Parliament had passed the [Forest Rights Act](#) in 2006. The law gave back to traditional forest dwellers their rights to access, manage and govern forest lands and resources within village boundaries, which had been controlled by the forest department since colonial times. The law makes the gram sabha the statutory body for managing forestlands, and protecting them. It provides that no activity should be carried out in these forests until individual and community claims over them have been settled.

The court directed state governments to evict Adivasis whose claims have been rejected. The three-judge bench comprising Justices Arun Mishra, Navin Sinha and Indira Banerjee gave the states time till July 27, when the matter will be heard next. It also asked the governments to submit a report on the matter in the Supreme Court.

The top court released the written order in the case on February 20. “In case the eviction is not carried out, as aforesaid, the matter would be viewed seriously by this court,” the order read. The court also asked the states to explain why there were no evictions despite rejection of claims.

Nearly 11,27,446 tribal and other forest-dwelling households have been rejected as per the rejection claims from 16 states that were submitted in the court, the

[Business Standard](#) reported on Wednesday. Other states that have not provided the details have been asked by the top court to do so. The numbers are likely to surge once the other states submit their data.

Congress President Rahul Gandhi had on February 14 alleged that the Bharatiya Janata Party was standing as a “silent spectator” when the Act was being challenged in the Supreme Court. “It is indicating its intentions to drive out lakhs of tribals and poor farmers from the forests,” he had said.

Several Adivasi groups whose claims have been rejected have demanded that they be reviewed. They have argued that the rejections in many cases are faulty, according to the *Business Standard*. Wildlife groups, meanwhile, have claimed that the law has led to deforestation.

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