

PRESS RELEASE

WGHR condemns motivated case against leading human rights defender

New Delhi, 18 October 2011 – The Working Group on Human Rights in India and the UN (WGHR) is deeply disturbed to learn that a leading Indian human rights activist, well known for espousing the cause of Dalits and all other marginalised groups for more than 30 years, is implicated into a motivated case under *The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989* (the PoA Act).

WGHR understands that a complaint under the PoA Act was launched against Mr. Henri Tiphagne (Executive Director, People's Watch) and his family on 3rd October 2011 by an ex-employee, whose services at People's Watch came to an end last year. The circumstances of the case indicate to the complaint was not for *bona fide* reasons. The complainant approached the police in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, on 3rd October and the complaint was registered with extraordinary promptness.

For Dr. Sirivella Prasad, General Secretary, National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR): "It is intriguing to see such enthusiasm to defame a human rights activist when it is usually so difficult to register cases under the PoA Act."

In Tamil Nadu, the percentage of registration of cases under the Act is only 28%. In the present instance, a case has been registered by the police with lightening speed against Mr. Tiphagne and his family in what appears to be nothing more than a trumped up case. Charges have been framed under section 3 (1) (x) of the PoA Act, which refer to: "intentionally insult or intimidate with intent to humiliate a member of a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe in any place within public view". This accusation is particularly frivolous in the context of the track record of Mr. Tiphagne, whose relentless efforts to champion the right to equality and dignity for all is widely known at the local, national and international levels.

Mr. Tiphagne is a reputed human rights activist, who has been engaged for the last three decades in numerous initiatives for the promotion and protection of the rights of the Dalit community, including the conduct of the Dalit human rights monitoring training programs for three years across the country (training over 1,000 people) and his teaching of human rights education in over 600 exclusive SC/ST schools in Tamil Nadu and Orissa. People's Watch, the organisation headed by Henri Tiphagne, was nominated for the Times of India 2011 Social Impact Award.

For Prof. Babu Mathew, Visiting Professor at the National Law University, Delhi: "The police seems to be using this as an opportunity to put a well-known human rights activist and his family who have espoused the cause of Dalits, and especially cases of atrocities, in the dock. It smacks of retaliation against somebody who has continuously invoked the same law (i.e. PoA Act) for the cause of Dalit justice."

Miloon Kothari, Convener of WGHR stated: "WGHR strongly condemns this attempt to discredit Henri Tiphagne and his family at a time when their contribution to peace and social justice in Tamil Nadu and the rest of the country is more important than ever. The actions of the police are a disturbing confirmation of an environment of growing hostility in the country towards genuine human rights activists." ■

For more information, contact: Sirivella Prasad: +919958890176 or Babu Mathew: +919810606988

The Working Group on Human Rights in India and the UN – a national coalition of fourteen human rights organisations and independent experts – works towards the realisation of all civil, cultural, economic, political and social human rights in India and towards holding the Indian government accountable to its national and international human rights obligations. For information on WGHR, please visit: www.wghr.org