

Tamil Nadu

Thoothukudi firing: Madras HC says cops responsible should be prosecuted for murder

A bench of justices SS Sundar and N Senthilkumar made the oral remarks while hearing a petition filed by human rights activist Henry Tiphagne seeking court to direct the NHRC to reopen the case of killing several unarmed Sterlite protestors.

Written by: [TNM Staff](#) | Published on: 02 Jul 2024, 9:07 am

In a harsh statement about police officials involved in the 2018 Thoothukudi police firing against Sterlite protestors, the Madras High Court, on Monday, July 1, said that those responsible for the shooting must be booked for murder. A bench of justices SS Sundar and N Senthilkumar made the oral remarks while hearing a petition filed by human rights activist Henry Tiphagne seeking court to direct the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to reopen the case of killing several unarmed Sterlite protestors.

The court made the remark when senior advocate Somasundaram, appearing on behalf of the then Deputy Superintendent of Police Linga Thirumaran, questioned if the petition was maintainable. This made the court retort saying that all police officers who were responsible for the firing incident must have been prosecuted for murder. "Grave injustice has been done. This is a serious matter. Is this how you want to treat the common public? You all should be prosecuted for murder," the bench had said.

The court adjourned further hearing in the case to July 15.

In 2018, several residents of Thoothukudi had gathered peacefully to demand the shutting down of Sterlite Copper. The civil protest that went on for about 100 days ended in unprecedented violence and led to open firing by the police, which resulted in the death of 14 people,

including that of 17-year-old Snowlin Jackson. The police fired on the protesters for two successive days on May 22 and 23, 2018, injuring more than 100 people.

The NHRC had taken up a suo motu investigation and the Tamil Nadu government also appointed former Madras high court judge Aruna Jagadeesan to conduct a probe into the matter. The committee submitted the report in October 2022, and held 21 officers responsible for the firing. Meanwhile, the NHRC closed the case. This closure was challenged by Henry Tiphagne, who contended that the NHRC merely referred to the compensation paid to the victim and did not mention any of the inquiry reports.

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