

TAMIL NADU

Legislation to protect human rights defenders stressed

STAFF REPORTER

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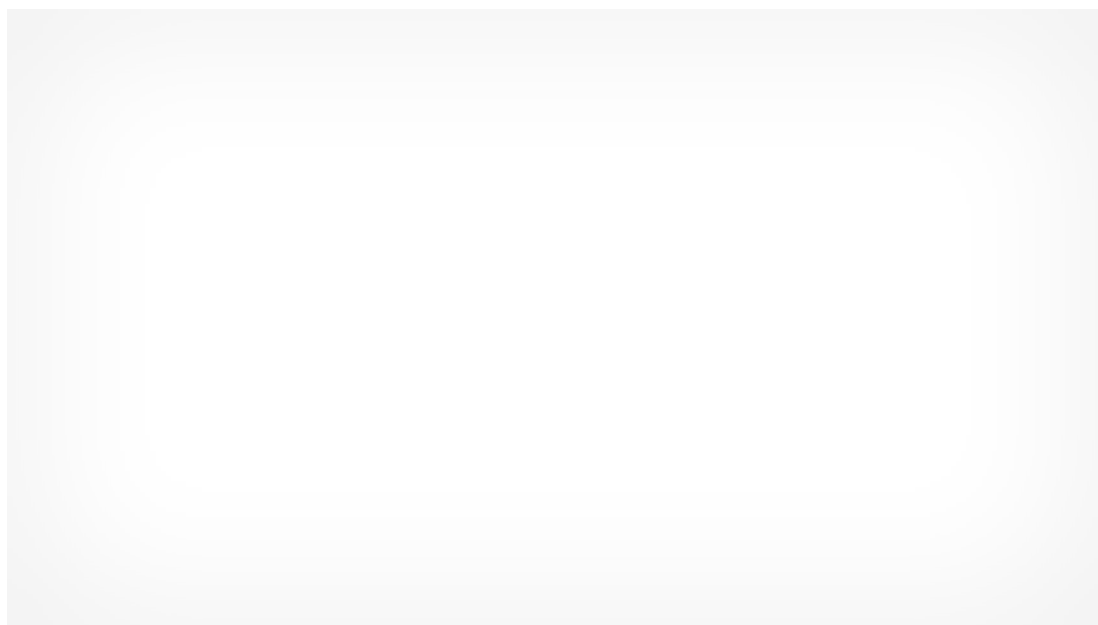
Advocates Henri Tiphagne and Lajapathy Roy explained the need for media persons to understand their role better in protecting human rights and their defenders at a workshop for journalists organised by Evidence, a non-governmental organisation, here on Sunday.

In his address, Henri Tiphagne, the executive director of human rights organisation People's Watch, spoke about the role of National Human Rights Commission, State Human Rights Commission and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders.

Mr. Tiphagne said that any group or individuals, including government servants, journalists, individuals and non-governmental organisations, who were involved in protection of human rights, would come under the definition of human rights defenders.

He stressed the importance of passing a legislation to protect human rights defenders based on the United Nations' Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. "A few countries have done it, but majority of others, including India, have not," he said.

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"Human rights defenders have the right to go in fact-finding missions to places where violation of human rights have happened," he added.

Advocate Lajapathy Roy spoke of continued prevalence of untouchability in the country, particularly in Tamil Nadu. He said temples were particularly rife with discrimination

based on caste. “Many people say Scheduled Castes Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act is misused, which is not true. The real problem is the lack of proper implementation of the Act. If it is implemented properly, untouchability and other caste-related oppressions can be prevented,” he said.

Citing several brutal cases of honour killings, A. Kathir, executive director, Evidence, said one of the reasons was the society viewing women as ‘caste purity institutions,’ because of which they were killed for marrying outside their caste. Honour killings, contrary to the perception that they were rampant only in the north Indian States, were widely prevalent in Tamil Nadu as well.

“A large number of them go unreported,” Mr. Kathir said.