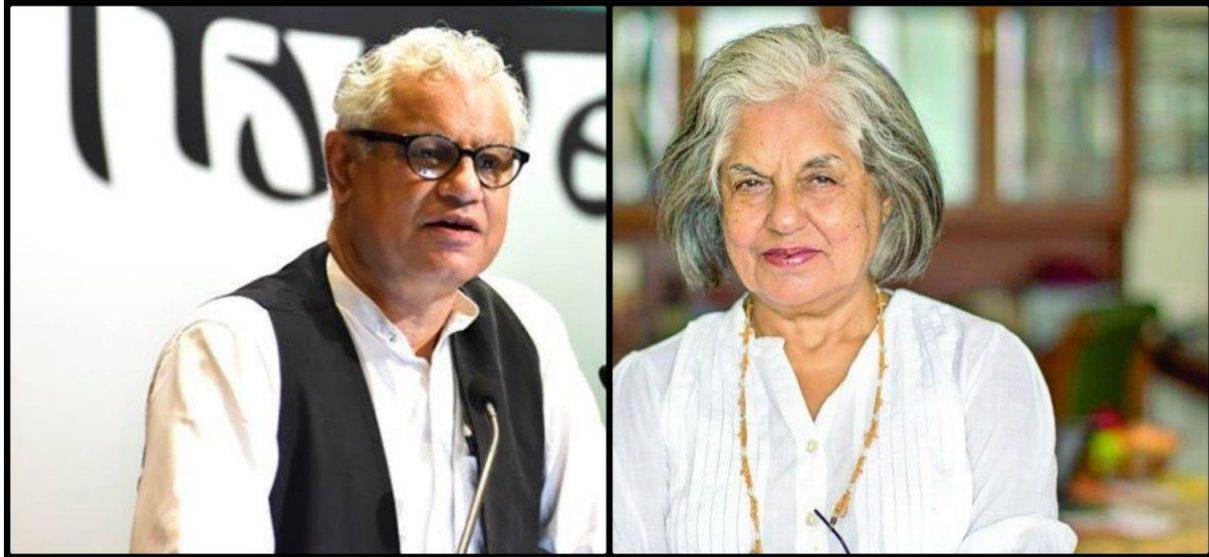


NHRC Seeks Progress Report From CBI in Case Against Lawyers Collective

Top lawyers and civil society activists have also alleged that the Centre is being vindictive against Indira Jaising and Anand Grover for being vocal critics of the Modi government.



New Delhi: The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has asked a progress report from the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on its inquiry against the Lawyers Collective – an NGO founded by senior advocates Indira Jaising and Anand Grover.

According to the *Economic Times*, the top human rights body’s intervention came on June 21 when it issued a statement saying that although the case was outside its purview, it was still addressing the issue as the CBI’s FIR appeared to have no fresh evidence against the NGO. The Commission said that it is “empowered under the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 to examine the issue to make it non-discriminatory and to avoid arbitrariness”.

Lawyers Collective has been accused of violating the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (FCRA). On May 15, the Union home ministry wrote to the CBI to investigate the organisation further for alleged discrepancies in the way it utilised its foreign aid. The ministry, in its 2016 report, had also named the Lawyers Collective for alleged FCRA violation.

This time around, both the home ministry’s communication to the CBI and the FIR came after another NGO, “Lawyers Voice” demanded action against Lawyers Collective in petition to the Supreme Court on May 8, 2019.

However, the CBI this time decided to file an FIR against the organisation. It has charged the NGO under various sections of the IPC, the FCRA and the Prevention of Corruption Act.

The NHRC, currently headed by former Chief Justice of India H.L. Dattu, sought a status report from the CBI after it received two complaints that said the decision to probe Lawyers Collective may have been arbitrary and discriminatory. The complaints were filed by Maja Daruwala, senior advisor at the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, and Henri Tiphagne, who is associated with the Human Rights' Defender's Alert.

“Taking into consideration that Shri Anand Grover and Ms. Indira Jaising have been actively raising the issues pertaining to alleged violation of human rights across the country and looking into their active role in the civil society, the Commission finds it appropriate to forward copies of the complaints lodged by Shri Henri Tiphagne and Ms. Maja Daruwala to the Director, Central Bureau of Investigation, New Delhi calling for present status of the investigation in the matter within 4 weeks,” **the NHRC statement said.**

Ever since the CBI filed the FIR, top lawyers and civil society activists have alleged that the government is being vindictive against Jaising and Grover, who have taken significant cases of human rights violations. They have also been severely critical of the government over the last five years. The Collective itself has called the case against it as an attack on free speech and victimisation for taking up sensitive cases which were damaging to the government's reputation.

Daruwala and Tiphagne, in their complaints, claimed that Jaising and Grover were being intimidated for their work as independent lawyers. She also added that over the last five years, many who challenged the government's policies have been similarly targeted through false cases, and the FIR against the organisation run by Jaising and Grover is a part of that pattern.

Both complaints said that a criminal case was an attempt to harass the advocates for their human rights work as there has been no change in material circumstances ever since the home ministry first named them for alleged FCRA violation in 2016.

<https://thewire.in/rights/lawyers-collective-nhrc-report>