

TAMIL NADU

## Illegal detentions, torture continue, says NGO



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**'Relatives of those in custody running from pillar to post to rescue them'**

Illegal detention and torture of people, including many students who took part

in the anti-Sterlite protests, and even the general public, were continuing in Thoothukudi, alleged the Madurai-based non-governmental organisation People's Watch, which is involved in coordinating a people's inquest on the recent police firing during protests against Sterlite.

In an interview with The Hindu on Saturday, its executive director Henri Tiphagne said illegal detentions came to light with the rescue of more than 90 people, including many juveniles, from the Vallanadu Shooting Range following a search by the Judicial Magistrate of Vilathikulam on Wednesday night.

He pointed out that while around 30 were immediately let off by the police after the search, the remaining 60 were presented before the court for remand in judicial custody. "Many subsequently obtained bail with the help of advocates," he said.

He alleged that even on Friday night, three students were found to be illegally detained at Thoothukudi South police station.

Pat for courts

Pointing out that the subordinate courts in Thoothukudi district, District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) and the advocates of Thoothukudi Bar Association were doing a commendable job in assisting the victims and ensuring due processes were followed, he said the administration must announce a toll free number for the DLSA.

"Remedy is being provided to those who approach DLSA. However, many people, whose family members have been detained by the police, are clueless about whom to approach," he said.

Arguing that it was a complete failure of the police and the district administration that resulted in the killing of 13 people and injuring hundreds on Tuesday, he said top police officials had to be held accountable.

"Instead, the government had deployed more than 20 IPS officers in Thoothukudi. The aim appears to be to create evidence to show that the police did everything as per procedure," he alleged

"There have been complaints from the public, including the families of the

deceased, that the police were asking them to sign statements without consent,” he added.

Stating that the single-member Commission of Inquiry appointed by the Tamil Nadu government could not bring out the truth, he said agencies such as the National Human Rights Commission and the State Human Rights Commission, which are empowered to investigate such human rights violations, must play a larger role.

Mr. Tiphagne said a Thoothukudi Firing People’s Inquest Coordination Committee, led by senior advocate A.W.D. Tilak, had been formed to organise a people’s inquest with the involvement of retired judges and police officials in the first week of June.