

## There is lack of awareness of human rights among citizens, says Thirumavalavan

*The killing of human rights defenders is an attack on democracy, says VCK president Thirumavalavan, at a seminar organised on the third death anniversary of human rights activist Father Stan Swamy*

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As there is lack of awareness about human rights among citizens, harassment of human rights defenders by the implementing agencies continues to rise in the country, said VCK president Thol. Thirumavalavan in Chennai on Saturday.

Speaking at a seminar on the third death anniversary of human rights activist Father Stan Swamy, Mr. Thirumavalavan said the killing of human rights defenders, such as Swamy, was an attack on democracy. “Human rights defenders, such as Father Stan Swamy, continue to sacrifice their lives. These human rights defenders did not oppose the implementation of the law. But they have been targeted by the officials of government agencies who follow a certain ideology. This ideology is based on right wing politics,” charged Mr.Thirumavalavan.

“Right wing politicians consider social justice as a part of left wing politics. They consider Dalit rights as left wing politics. They also think that voices for women emancipation are also part of left wing politics. The right wing politicians even consider democracy as left wing politics. They don’t believe in democracy. But they conceal it to capture power by electoral politics for strengthening their hidden agenda,” Mr.Thirumavalavan said.

DMK Rajya Sabha MP N. R. Elango said the government should become the defender of human rights. “The people should ensure such a government is formed. Otherwise, the government will continue to frame rules that deny rights to human rights defenders. In addition to the UAPA, many statutory provisions have been made to deny human rights. Supreme Court judgements are expected to protect human rights defenders,” said Mr.Elango.

DMK MLA Inigo Irudayaraj said unity among all sections of the society was crucial to protect democracy and ensure prosperity of the country, in a period of divisiveness promoted by certain ideologies.

“We will voice these issues in the Assembly. The event on December 8 to install a statue of Father Stan Swamy in his native village will sensitise all the people to protection of human rights defenders,” Mr. Irudayaraj said.

Henri Tiphagne, founder of human rights organisation People’s Watch, said the Tamil Nadu government should enact a law to protect human rights defenders, to prevent “institutional murders” similar to that of Father Stan Swamy. “The State government should create a unit to protect human rights defenders in the State Human Rights Commission,” Mr. Tiphagne said. “Tamil Nadu should set an example for the other states in the country,” he added.

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