

Members of civil society seek immediate release of farmers, who protested against proposed SIPCOT unit near Cheyyar

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Prominent members of the civil society on Tuesday have appealed to the Chief Minister M. K. Stalin for the immediate release of 20 farmers, who were arrested for protesting against the proposed SIPCOT unit near Cheyyar town in Tiruvannamalai | Photo Credit: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Prominent members of the civil society on Tuesday has appealed to the Chief Minister M. K. Stalin for the immediate release of 20 farmers, who were arrested for protesting against the proposed SIPCOT unit near Cheyyar town in Tiruvannamalai.

In a statement, the civil society has sought the intervention of the Chief Minister to take steps to withdraw cases against farmers of Melma and surrounding villages and release them immediately. “We strongly condemn the high handedness of the Tamil Nadu government and its police to arrest and remand the farmers,” social activist Aruna Roy of Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) said in the statement.

The farmers have been doing a peaceful sit-in protest in patta land for more than 100 days opposing the proposed acquisition of the State government. However, police barged into the houses of farmers and arrested them on November 4. Later, twenty of them were remanded to judicial custody on an FIR filed in August.

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Instead of acknowledging the grave concerns of farmers and finding a democratic solution to their demands, the stand of the State government to oppress the fundamental rights of farmers to peaceful assembly, free speech and expression is highly condemnable. The act of arrest and remand is illegal and unconstitutional.

The statement further said that the FIR filed in August on which they were remanded now was booked when they were walking together for a public hearing. The police stopped them from walking and booked them under sections of unlawful assembly and other sections. The sections under which they were booked have a maximum punishment of five years.

The State government should view the situation of farmers with empathy and adopt constitutional and lawful means of dialogue and public hearings to hear and resolve the issues of farmers, it said. However, harassing them further by keeping them in jail to pressurize and acquire lands from them forcefully is undemocratic and unconstitutional. The arrest of the farmers seems to be done to stifle the free speech of farmers and crush the critical questioning of the State's action. The arrest is also meant to be a chilling example to scare other farmers in the future, the statement said.

The statement was signed by Vasanthi Devi, former vice chancellor, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, V. Suresh, advocate, Madras High Court and PUCL, Henri Tiphagne, National Working Secretary, HRDA, Nityanand Jayaraman of Chennai Solidarity Group, G. Sundarajan, Poovulagin Nanbargal, Ananthoo, Safe Food Alliance, Seethalakshmi, Organic Farmers market, Balaji Sankar, Thalanmai Malargirathu, Mahima, India Handmade Collective, Jayaram Venkatesan, Convener, Arappor Iyakkam, Aruna Roy, MKSS, Nikhil Dey, MKSS, Shankar Singh, MKSS, and Sudha Ramalingam, human rights activist and advocate of the Madras High Court, the statement said.

As per the plan, 3,174 acres of land will be acquired from nine farming villages — Melma, Narmapallam, Kurumbur, Thethurai, Nedungal, Athi, Vada Alapirandan, Veerambakkam, and Elaneerkundram — for the phase-3 project, which began over a decade back, in Anakavoor panchayat union. Residents of the nine villages had been protesting against land acquisition at Anakkavur panchayat union since July 2. Two public consultation meetings that were held in Cheyyar town by the district administration did not yield the desired result.

Along with environmental activists and residents, AIADMK cadres led by former AIADMK Minister Sevar S. Ramachandran held a day-long protest against the project at the Anakavoor panchayat union near Cheyyar town on October 4 after it was announced by AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami.

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/members-of-civil-society-seek-immediate-release-of-farmers-who-protested-against-proposed-sipcot-unit-near-cheyyar/article67532491.ece>