

Madras HC bats for better prison culture; orders reforms

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Madras high court



MADURAI: Prisoners deserve a dignified life and they must enjoy their rights during incarceration, said Madras high court, underscoring the need to improve prison culture and environment in [Tamil Nadu](#).

To achieve the twin goals, a division bench laid down a set of directions, including formation of board of visitors for each jail and appointment of non-official visitors to all jails in the state.

The bench of Justice R Mahadevan and Justice J Sathya Narayana Prasad, passing orders on a public interest writ petition filed by advocate and executive director of People's Watch Henri Tiphagne, quoted [Nelson Mandela](#), who stated: "No one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones."

A committee must be formed to ensure periodic appointment of non-official visitors to all prisons/jails within the state, the judges said. Board of visitors should periodically review and advise the prison authorities on various aspects of facilities, training, correctional work, etc. The minutes of the meeting of the board of visitors along with the suggestions to the government shall be uploaded on the website, district/prison wise.

Appropriate steps should be taken to reduce overcrowding of prisoners in the prisons, they said. An effective grievance redressal system should be provided with the provisions of complaint box and CCTV cameras and alert system in the barracks of jails.

The judges directed the department to prepare a 'Prisoners' Rights Handbook' containing information on their rights, applicable laws and regulations, mechanism for raising grievances/complaints with the board of visitors and other authorities concerned, expected behaviour from prisoners and disciplinary action for violations. Each prisoner should be given a copy of the book and made available online, and be a part of the prison department website.

The judges ordered regular training and refresher courses for prison officials and personnel, in collaboration with the Academy of Prisons and Correctional Administration. Those who directly interact with inmates need it to create a sensitive and dignified prison environment, the bench said.

In his PIL, Tiphagne stated that the appointment of non-official visitors to the Board of visitors to prisons, in accordance with Rule 507 of the Tamil Nadu Prison Rules, 1983, was essential to address grievances of prisoners.