

Human Rights Defender Henri Tiphagne Selected to Win Civil Liberties Award

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New Delhi: The founder and executive director of Madurai-based human rights organisation People's Watch, Henri Tiphagne, has been selected under the individuals category for the Nani A. Palkhiwala Award for Civil Liberties this year.

Tiphagne *told The Hindu* that "the award cannot be seen as a recognition of his individual efforts, but for the collective work in defending human rights he had been part of with like-minded activists and victims of human rights abuse over the years".

The selection was made by a panel of judges comprising retired Supreme Court judges Sujata Manohar and S.N. Variava and Sudha N. Murthy, the chairperson of the Infosys Foundation. The award carries a cash prize of Rs 2.5 lakh and a citation.

Saying that he was incredibly humbled to have been chosen at a time when India is tangled in several fights to preserve democracy and the right to dissent, he said, "The award is also a boost for continuing the fight for dissent, democracy and human rights not only in the courts of law, but also on the streets."

According to a press release, the award will be presented on the occasion of the 16th Nani A. Palkhiwala Memorial Lecture to be delivered by Justice R.F. Nariman, Judge, Supreme Court of India, on December 15 in Mumbai.

Tiphagne has previously received the Amnesty International's Human Rights Award in the year 2016.

In a **2014 interview** with International Service for Human Rights, Tiphagne spoke about how he was initially inspired to join the fight against human rights violations – by his mother “who worked to combat leprosy in India for almost 60 years” and by his engagement with the student movement known as the All India Catholic University Federation. He eventually started working at the grassroots level, “engaging in relief operations in a flood affected area in Tamil Nadu”.

“In spite of our vibrant constitution and our vigilant judiciary, which most often is willing to stand on our side, we find that our right to assemble, to protest, to show dissent is being violated. Social protest in this country is gradually becoming criminalised. For instance, even the mobilisation of affected communities in a continuous non-violent assembly may be rendered a criminal activity by the State and there are instances where cases of sedition are filed against the organisers,” he said.

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