



People's Watch

No.32, Besant Road, Chokkikulam, Madurai - 625 002
Phone: +91-452-2531874 & 2539520 Fax: +91-452-2531874
E.mail: info@pwtn.org Web: www.peopleswatch.org

A Network Towards Human Rights Monitoring, Intervention, Campaign, Research and Documentation
(A Programme Unit of the Centre for Promotion of Social Concerns)

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PRESS STATEMENT

Condemning the malicious act of circulating manipulated video of Prof. Fathima Babu

We are expressing our strong condemnation over the manipulated video of Prof. Fathima Babu, convenor of anti-Sterlite coalition that has been circulated since yesterday in the social media websites and platforms which allegedly portrays her in a compromising position with her colleague Mr. Raja, who is also associated with the anti-Sterlite movement.

The video is known to be recorded using a spy camera at a hotel room in the month of October when Prof. Fathima and her colleagues of the anti-Sterlite coalition travelled to Chennai to attend the hearing before the expert committee of the National Green Tribunal regarding the case against closure of Sterlite Industries in Thoothukudi this year. The video has been cleverly edited and manipulated to portray Prof. Fathima in a compromising position.

It was also falsely claimed that the video has been leaked by 'Makkal Adhigaram', an organisation which is also working towards the permanent closure of Sterlite Industries in Thoothukudi. We strongly believe this is a cheap effort taken to divide the anti-Sterlite movement and also to create 'caste' conflict within the anti-Sterlite coalition. Makkal Adhigaram has released a statement denying this allegation, and we strongly appreciate their position over this incident.

We also strongly iterate the fact that this incident is a gross violation of individual privacy and vehemently condemn this act of scandalising a women human rights defender. It is being alleged that this perverted effort to scandalise and defame a genuine women human rights defender has the handiworks of the business house against whom Prof. Fathima Babu has been working against for decades and also the connivance of the police.

We also state that circulation of such videos and pictures in the public domain about WHRDs is witnessed globally and it has been iterated in the report of the then United Nation's Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders Ms. Margaret Sekaggya in her report that "*women defenders often find themselves and their work subjected to stigmatization by both State and non-State actors*". This concerted effort would not only shame and discredit the WHRDs work but will also possibly contribute to the public repudiation.

Hence, we demand that the Director General of Police, Tamil Nadu sets up an immediate enquiry into this matter and order for an investigation by the Cyber Crime Cell to find out:

- How a spy camera has been fixed exactly at the room where Prof. Fathima Babu has stayed and who has fixed it? And who fixed it
- Who has edited the video to purportedly show Prof. Fathima in a compromising position?
- To find the source of this video

We as a platform working for the protection of women/human rights defenders would like to strongly state that this incident done with the mala fide intent is not only to discredit the work and efforts of the WHRD concerned but also to defame the entire anti-Sterlite coalition and we stand in solidarity with Prof. Fathima and the Vyabarigal Sangam which Raja represents to overcome this concerted campaign.

We earnestly call upon all citizens of Thoothukudi , all movements and platforms which work against Sterlite Industries in courts, on the streets, in the villages not to get divided due to this malicious effort and continue to unitedly fight against all state and non-state actors who are trying to work against the will of the citizens of Thoothukudi and the people of Tamil Nadu towards the permanent closure of Sterlite Industries in Thoothukudi.



Henri Tiphagne
Executive Director