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Press Release

People's Watch demands the withdrawal of the Madurai Kamaraj University Registrar's Undemocratic Statement/Circular Warning Action Against Those Participating In Protests & Demonstrations.

The Madurai Kamaraj University (MKU) and the appointment of its last two Vice Chancellors have been the subject matter of litigations at the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court. In fact a litigation challenging the appointment of the present Vice Chancellor even cited a criminal case against him by the Madurai police which is awaiting final orders from the court. Even as this issue continues, People's Watch finds it troubling that a sitting-woman judge of the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court delivered the convocation address of the MKU on 29th January, 2018.

This was followed by the surfacing of the shocking telephonic conversation of Prof. Nirmala Devi which was fervently attended to by the Vice Chancellor, who appointed a committee to enquire the matter and later withdrew the said committee after the Chancellor of the University, who also happens to be the Governor of Tamil Nadu, appointed his one-man-committee, led by Mr. R. Santhanam, a ret'd. IAS officer to probe the issue. Meanwhile, the police registered a criminal case against the Professor and transferred the said case to the CBCID for further investigation. A woman SP and her team lead this investigation at the moment.

People's Watch is appalled by the unfortunate fact that till date there has been no citing of the of the Sexual Harassment at the Workplace Act, 2013 or the UGC (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal of Sexual Harassment of Women Employees and Students) Regulations 2015 by any official. The State Commission for Women, headed by Ms. Kannagi Packianathan, IAS (Retd.) has also remained silent and none in power have appealed for an intervention by her.

People's Watch finds the silence of the first woman Chief Justice of the Madras High Court, Honorable Justice Indira Banerjee, along with her team of 10 women judges on the Bench disheartening. In a scenario such as this where two parallel enquiries are in place, involving people of power within the educational structure, this silence from the judges deprives citizens of an opportunity to strengthen their belief in our democracy and Constitution. When suo moto powers are being used by the judges of the Madras High Court on several other pressing public interest matters, it is all painful to observe this silence.

In light of the recent events, People's Watch condemns the statement of MKU's Registrar, Mr. V. Chinniah, who warned the staff of disciplinary action if they participate in protests or meetings that malign the reputation of the university. It upholds the role of all members of the MKU in protecting gender justice and women's rights. It is the duty of the academic community to speak and create awareness on the UGC guidelines as well as to protest and raise these issues publicly. In the face of such violations, those fighting to protect their rights as individuals assumes the rights and responsibilities of Human Rights Defenders all around the world.

People's Watch demands the withdrawal of MKU Registrar's statement and the circular sent communicating the same and sees this warning by the Registrar as an act of intimidation by the MKU to safeguard its higher officials. People's Watch urges the MKU faculty and students to join the larger movement across the country against the shrinking democratic space within universities and colleges to demand gender justice and an environment free of sexual harassment. People's Watch hopes that the women judges of the Madras High Court will redeem the situation and call for a court-monitored process to supervise both the enquiries without further delay.

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