



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS' ALERT - INDIA

NATIONAL SECRETARIAT

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HRDA/UA/SOUTH/TN/01/08/2025

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To,
Hon'ble Justice Mr. V. Ramasubramanian (Retd),
Chairperson,
National Human Rights Commission,
Manav Adhikar Bhawan,
Block-C, GPO Complex, INA,
New Delhi -110 023
Email: chairnhrc@nic.in

Dear Sir,

Sub: HRD Alert- Urgent Appeal for Action- Regarding Premeditated Murder of Human Rights Defender Adv. Muruganantham in Dharapuram, Tamil Nadu - State Complicity and Systemic Failure to Protect Human Rights Defender - Reg

Greetings from Human Rights Defenders Alert!

HRD Alert -India is a forum of Human Rights Defenders for Human Rights Defenders. It endeavours to initiate actions on behalf of Human Rights Defenders under threat or with security concerns.

We are writing to express our concern regarding the premeditated murder of HRD Adv.Muruganantham in Dharapuram, Tamil Nadu - State Complicity and Systemic Failure to Protect Human Rights Defender.

About the Human Rights Defenders:

Adv. Muruganantham was a law-abiding citizen and advocate living with progressive Becker's Muscular Dystrophy, with a disability level of approximately 70%. As a person with disabilities himself, L. Muruganantham has been a dedicated activist championing the rights of persons with disabilities. He was a practicing advocate who had conducted cases in various courts, including the Hon'ble High Court of Madras and the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. As a human rights advocate, he had actively appeared before the Hon'ble High Court and Supreme Court in multiple matters pertaining to the rights of disabled persons, prison reforms, and unauthorized constructions. He was recently instrumental in securing a landmark judgment from the Hon'ble Supreme Court on 15 July 2025, concerning the rights of

prisoners with disabilities which has been reported in various law journals including "CaseMine" as "The Muruganantham Doctrine."

On 28th July 2025, He was hacked to death due to a property dispute with his uncle R. Dhandapani, who owns a Thenmalar Higher Secondary School, Dharapuram.

Source of Information:

- In Communication with the HRD family
- Fact-finding by the HRDs
- Media Reports

Perpetrators:

- Mr. Dhandapani
- Mr. Karthikeyan, S/o Dhandapani,
- Commissioner, Dharapuram Municipality
- Deputy Superintendent of Police, Dharapuram
- Inspector of Police, Dharapuram
- The Surveying Officer, Dharapuram

Date of Incident:

28th July 2025

Place of Incident:

Disputed land adjacent to Thenmalar School, Dharapuram.

Background:

On July 28, 1999, the late Mr. Lingasa, father of Adv. Muruganantham, was an ex-serviceman was brutally murdered, in connection with the same property dispute. The deceased was beheaded, and his body was dismembered. Mr. Dhandapani, the younger brother of the deceased Mr. Lingasa, was the primary accused in the aforementioned murder case. Subsequently, the said Dhandapani was acquitted by the trial court solely on the benefit of doubt.

Following his father's tragic death, Adv. Muruganantham filed Writ Petition No. 4818 of 2025 before the Hon'ble High Court of Madras, challenging violations of approved building plans. The petition specifically addressed how such violations prevented fire safety vehicles from accessing the southern perimeter of Thenmalar School premises during emergencies. According to the sanctioned building plans, a mandatory clearance of 4 meters should be maintained between the building structure and the compound wall; however, only 1.2 meters of clearance was available in the present case.

Consequently, the safety and security of students enrolled at Thenmalar School remained compromised due to these building plan violations. The unauthorized construction created an impediment to fire service accessibility to the southern side of the school building during emergency situations. These material facts and grounds were duly pleaded by the HRD in Writ Petition No. 4818 of 2025.

After hearing all parties to W.P. No. 4818 of 2025, this Hon'ble Madras High Court Court was pass an order dated April 2, 2025, directing the respondents to demolish the unauthorized construction at Thenmalar Higher Secondary School, Dharapuram.

“In view of the facts and circumstances, the respondents No.5, 6 and 7 are directed to complete the process and demolish the unauthorized construction during the month of May 2025 and complete the enforcement action before commencement of the next academic year by restoring the building in accordance with the building plan approval.”

The Commissioner of Dharapuram Municipality filed a compliance report dated July 1, 2025, in W.M.P. No. 26208 of 2025 connected to W.P. No. 4818 of 2025, seeking extension of time for compliance. However, this report misled the Hon'ble High Court of Madras by falsely stating that after constructing a new wall, the distance between the compound wall and building structure measured 4.2 meters. The said report deliberately suppressed the material fact that the land upon which the newly constructed wall stands is not covered under the original building plan approval, constituting a blatant violation of municipal regulations. This misleading report by the Commissioner of Dharapuram Municipality demonstrates the undue influence exercised by Dhandapani over government officials.

The Hon'ble High Court had specifically directed the authorities to verify and demolish any unauthorized construction upon discovering further violations on the disputed land. However, government officials submitted false affidavits and misleading compliance reports with the apparent intent to protect the accused persons.

Details of the Incident:

The Town Surveyor in Petition No. 3691/2025/F1 dated 22.07.2025 issued a summon calling L. Murugantham and Dhandapani to be present at 1 PM on 28.07.2025, while surveying the land in T.S No.21/1B. 21/1A, 20/19B, Dharapuram. On 28.07.2025 at approximately 1:15 pm, the survey official called L. Murugantham over the phone and stated that he along with other Officials were in the surveying area and they were waiting for the Mr. Murugantham to survey the place, and believing the same, Mr. Murugantham along with his relatives and his friends visited the spot at about 2.00 PM on the southern side of Thenmalar School. At the

place of occurrence, the said accused Dhandapani and another accused Karthikeyan were waiting along with contract killers and on seeing the HRD (Adv. Muruganantham), Dhandapani ordered his men to kill the HRD Mr. Muruganandham like his father was butchered 25 years ago and the henchmen of Dhandapani came out of Thenmalar school bus holding weapons and attacked the HRD and his companions, leaving the HRD dead and one lawyer's hand, namely Ragawan, was almost separated, and he was taking treatment at Ganga Hospital, Coimbatore, while others fled away. The Henchmen cut open Mr. Muruganandham's head, smashed the brain, saying his brain is the cause of all his actions. Now the police are trying to make it a family dispute.

It is pertinent to note that the HRD's father Mr. Lingasamy, was murdered on 28.07.1999. The fact that the government officials had issued a summon on the death anniversary of HRD's father and that the concerned officials were not present strongly suggests that the murder of the HRD is premeditated, well planned and more so in collusion with government officials.

The HRD, Adv. Murugannatham was contemplating filing a contempt petition, and had a survey been conducted on July 28, 2025, with the resulting report submitted before the High Court, numerous officials would have faced judicial scrutiny and their positions would have been jeopardized. Under these exceptional circumstances, wherein the accused persons possess substantial financial resources and muscle power, the local police and district authorities appear unable and/or unwilling to conduct a proper investigation, as there appears to be active collusion between the accused and government officials.

It is pertinent to note that despite the registration of FIR No. 371 of 2025 at Dharapuram Police Station, no action whatsoever has been initiated against the government and school officials involved in luring the HRD into this fatal trap in collusion with the said accused Dhandapani. The Police have refused to include the deceptive phone call and surveyor's summons in the FIR. All CCTV cameras around the school campus were rendered dysfunctional for a week prior to the incident. Furthermore, no action has been taken against the management of Thenmalar School, a public charitable trust, for allowing their property to be utilized for committing the murder of the HRD—a law-abiding citizen and renowned advocate dedicated to protecting the rights of persons with disabilities—in broad daylight while he was wearing his legal uniform.

The utilization of educational charitable trust property for criminal activities is contrary to public policy and violates the very objects of the Trust, thereby placing the children studying at Thenmalar School in a precarious and vulnerable position

while exposing them to murderers harboring on school premises. The fact that murderers concealed themselves in a school bus with weapons and committed the murder at the school boundary exposes innocent children to anti-social elements.

Educational institutions cannot be permitted to aid, abet, assist, or facilitate any criminal offense under any circumstances. The persons who utilized school property to commit murder cannot be permitted to continue managing the educational institution in the best interests of the children, as any such continuation is completely contrary to public policy and the interests of the Trust, creating an inherent conflict of interest.

It is evident that if an independent surveying officer conducts a proper survey, the following violations would be exposed, the school buildings were not constructed in accordance with the approved plans, the entire building structure was constructed away from the approved site, and government officials had deliberately concealed these facts before the Hon'ble High Court under the guise of minor deviations.

The accused Dhandapani is an influential person with substantial financial resources and muscle power. His son is also a legal practitioner, and the manner in which this murder was planned, executed, and followed by a stage-managed surrender—while the alleged legal mastermind, Mr. Karthikeyan S/o Dhandapani, remains absconding/in hiding in a pre-planned manner—suggests an intent to coerce and/or threaten witnesses and/or cause evidence to disappear. The government officials, whose positions were/are at stake in the pending legal proceedings, appear to have played a role in the murder of the HRD. There are reasonable grounds to suspect that these acts were committed in collusion, and that the murder of Mr. Muruganantham's father was a direct consequence of his efforts to expose such fraudulent governmental conduct.

The Human Rights Defenders Alert (HRDA) strongly believes that the murder of HRD L. Muruganantham constitutes an act of reprisal against his legitimate right to expression and his dedicated human rights work. This heinous act represents a deliberate attempt to silence advocacy and intimidate other defenders.

The Advocates Act, 1961, Section 35 protects advocates from arbitrary interference in their professional duties. The murder occurred while Advocate Muruganantham was wearing his legal uniform, making this a direct attack on the legal profession itself. This violates the fundamental protection that lawyers must be able to perform their duties without fear of violence or intimidation.

In the landmark case of **P. Shanmugam v. State of Tamil Nadu (1994) 1 SCC 298**, Advocate P. Shanmugam was murdered by police officers for representing cases against police excesses. The Hon'ble Supreme Court took suo motu cognizance of

the murder, directed a CBI investigation, and awarded compensation to the victim's family. This case established the precedent that the state is liable for failing to protect advocates and mandated disciplinary action against negligent officials.

This murder constitutes a violation of multiple Constitutional rights, including:

Article 19(1)(a) - Freedom of Speech and Expression: The murder was designed to silence human rights advocacy.

Article 21 - Right to Life and Personal Liberty: The fundamental right to life was violated with State complicity through inaction.

Article 32 - Right to Constitutional Remedies: The constitutional machinery has been compromised by official collusion

International Law Violations

This case violates the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR):

- **Article 6 - Right to Life:** The deliberate killing of Advocate Muruganantham constitutes a violation of the most fundamental human right
- **Article 9 - Right to Liberty and Security:** Human rights defenders must be protected from arbitrary detention, threats, and violence
- **Article 19 - Freedom of Expression:** The murder was intended to silence legal advocacy and human rights work

The **UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (1999)** seeks to protect the monitoring and advocacy functions of defenders by recognizing their right to obtain and disseminate information relevant to human rights enjoyment.

The United Nations has expressed significant concern over threats, violence, and attacks targeting human rights defenders. These individuals, who advocate for human rights protection, often face serious risks, including attacks on their property and lives. The UN Declaration emphasizes that States have a duty to protect human rights defenders from any threats or harm, including safeguarding their property and ensuring proper investigation of acts of vandalism or intimidation, with accountability for perpetrators.

The UN has appointed a **Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders**, whose mandate includes monitoring and reporting on threats against human rights defenders.

The murder of Advocate Muruganantham represents a grave violation of international human rights law, constitutional guarantees, and professional protection

principles. The independence of lawyers is a fundamental principle of international law, as lawyers play a crucial role in the administration of justice and protection of human rights.

The State's failure to protect him, investigate effectively, and prosecute all perpetrators constitutes multiple violations of India's international obligations and domestic legal framework. The international community recognizes that attacks on lawyers wearing legal attire are particularly egregious, as they constitute direct assaults on the administration of justice and rule of law.

This case demands immediate international attention, independent investigation, and comprehensive remedies to ensure justice for Adv. Muruganantham and protection of human rights defenders in India.

Appeal:

We urge the Hon'ble Commission to take cognisance of the above case and urgently:

- Direct the Director General of Investigation of the NHRC to communicate with the IG (west) Tamil Nadu to report the progress made in the Criminal Investigation. and submit the report to NHRC within the period of two weeks.
- Direct appropriate compensation to victim's family and injured parties.
- Issue protection orders for witnesses and the surviving mother of the victim under Witness protection scheme,2018.
- Direct the state government to appoint an independent management for Thenmalar School pending investigation of this case as well as the trial.
- Intervene in this case by appointing a senior Lawyer, preferably Mr. P.B. Mohan in order to accompany the Investigation officers and then assist the prosecution on behalf of the NHRC since this is a murder of an HRD.

We hope to hear from you soon,

Yours Sincerely,



(Henri Tiphagne)

National Working Secretary

Copy to:

1. The Hon'ble Justice J.B. PARDIWALA, Supreme Court of India.
2. The Hon'ble Justice R. MAHADEVAN, Supreme Court of India.