

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS MUST OBEY LAW OF THE LAND, INDIA SAYS IN GENEVA

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: UNO and its various Agencies

India appreciates the role of human rights defenders, journalists and activists in the democratic system but the activities of these groups and individuals should be in conformity with the law of the land, said Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta at the Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva on Thursday. The session was live-streamed.

Starting the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review of India at the HRC, Greece, the Netherlands and Vatican City on Thursday called upon the Government of India to ensure freedom of religion and end discrimination against human rights defenders and religious minorities.

“Actions were taken against some organisations due to their illegal practices including malafide re-routing of money and wilful and continuing violations of extant legal provisions, foreign exchange management rules and tax law of India,” said Tushar Mehta in defence of India’s actions regarding the human rights defenders. Earlier, the member countries of the HRC made a number of observations touching upon Indian society and polity.

“Immediately release all human rights defenders,” said Luxembourg.

The strongest comment came from Greece that called upon India to “ensure full implementation of freedom of religion”. Germany expressed concern about the rights situation in India and said, “Germany remains concerned about the rights of marginalised groups, especially religious minorities as well as women and girls.” Germany also said that the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act should not “unduly restrict” the “freedom of association” in India. The German representative called upon India to strengthen the National Human Rights Commission and said the discrimination against Dalits should end.

Ireland recommended that the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act be applied in a transparent manner and that Indian States should “repeal” anti-conversion laws to ensure compliance to international human rights laws. The representative of South Korea also raised the issue of the FCRA. Italy asked India to enable civil society organisations and freedom of expression and freedom of religion. “Take concrete measures to end violence against them [minorities],” said the representative of Italy.

Lithuania called upon India to end restrictions on freedom of expression and civil society. Belgium which had submitted advance questions raised the issue of civil liberties in India and called for an end to restrictions on freedom of religion. Mauritius praised India for following the principle of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* [the world is one family].

Maldives thanked India for the country’s support during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Marshall Islands expressed condolences for the victims of the Morbi bridge tragedy and called for an end to caste-based violence and violence against women. Mexico raised the National Register of Citizenship and called for measures that can reduce chances of stateless people. France and Montenegro called upon India to ratify the Convention against Torture.

Actions were taken against some organisations due to their illegal practices, including wilful violations of legal provisions

Tushar Mehta

Solicitor-General of India

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