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Press Release

People's Watch calls for the order of immediate closure of Sterlite Copper Smelter Plant No. 1 and for the stoppage of construction at the Copper Smelter Plant No.2, by the Chief Minister Edappadi Palanisamy. People's Watch would like to highlight that the Chief Minister's inaction during the 100 day protest and his gross negligence during the Tuticorin Sterlite Protest has resulted in the loss of over a dozen lives, left several brutally injured and has caused extensive damage to property.

A People's Watch delegation, which was present on the ground to monitor the protest after due notification to the Superintendent of Police, witnessed several failed attempts by the police to lathi charge the protesters, who were approaching the epicentre of the protest rally from all directions. The lathi charge saw little to no impact on the marching crowds whose growing numbers posed a direct threat to the safety of the police contingent. The police were forced to fall back and were eventually delegated to guard the Collectorate.

On the ground, the people's anger was evident, the attempted lathi charges only added to this anger. The protest, which was at first peaceful and included a diverse gathering including persons with disabilities and transgender persons, soon turned violent as a result of the police shooting at the Collectorate. As soon as people found out that fellow protesters were shot dead by the police and several others were left injured, they resorted to violence. The protesters began to target their violence towards the Sterlite Housing Quarters, which was located right beside the Collectorate.

The People's Watch delegation witnessed, first hand, stone pelting on the Sterlite Housing Quarters, which, shockingly, was not cleared for evacuation beforehand. The protesters who eventually forced an entry into the compound collected petrol from the two-wheelers and used it to make petrol bombs and set ablaze nearly twenty cars and bikes that were packed in the basement of the building. A few protesters turned against each other in the chaos and accused each other of being policemen dressed

in *mufti*. A photographer, who was a part of the People's Watch delegation was identified as a member of the press and threatened with violence. In the midst of the chaos, a man with blood oozing out of his head was taken away to receive medical assistance. He alleged that he was shot by the police at the Collectorate.

People's Watch is appalled by the total failure on the part of the Central and State intelligence agencies both of which evidently were not prepared for such a large protest and completely misjudged the people's anger on the ground. People's Watch observes that the Government of Tamil Nadu, which was given a choice to either stand by its people or by a copper industry, chose the private entity instead.

People's Watch is also forced to remind the Government of Tamil Nadu that on the 24th of March, 2018, a similar show of strength, witnessed the peaceful assembly of nearly 2 lakh protesters in Tuticorin. Why did the State fail to take pointers from that protest?

It must also be brought to the attention of the public and the State that the police firing in Tuticorin was indiscriminate and random. There was no warning signs given to the protesters that the police were going to open fire.

Based on the above statement, People's Watch demands the following;

1. A joint suo-moto enquiry be conducted by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) on the entire duration of the Sterlite protest and the brutal use of police force at the protest dated 22nd May, 2018.
2. A total compensation of twenty lakhs be paid to the families of those killed in the police firing.
3. An immediate order to be issued by the Government of Tamil Nadu to stop all continuing forms of police excess in Tuticorin.

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