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Victims of STF atrocities urge NHRC intervention

They deposed before a panel in a public hearing

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NEW DELHI: "Just two months after I was married, the Karnataka police came to my house and asked my husband to accompany them. He did not return. One year after he was killed the police showed me a photograph of my husband saying he had been killed. I am now all alone," said twenty five-year old Shivagami, whose husband was killed in an alleged encounter by the Joint Special Task Force (JSTF) and Veerappan's gang. She was one of the victims alleging atrocities by members of the JSTF set up by the Tamil Nadu and Karnataka Governments to nab Veerappan. The victims deposed before a panel in a public hearing organised by the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW).

Shocking incidents

In their moving testimonies, the victims, mostly women, related shocking incidents of illegal detention, torture, rape and humiliation by officers of the JSTF. Members of the panel included former Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court Justice Ra-

jinder Sachar, Professor Kamal Mitra Chenoy from the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Ravi Nair from South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre and Primla Loomba from NFIW.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), in June 1999, constituted a panel consisting of Justice A. Sadashiva and C. V. Narasimhan to hear depositions of 128 victims and 28 JSTF officers over a period of four years. The panel submitted its report to the NHRC on December 2, 2003. Almost two years since the NHRC has not taken any action, and has not made the report public.

Said Henri Tiphagne of the campaign for the release and rehabilitation of JSTF victims, "The testimonies before the Justice Sadashiva panel are only a sample of the scale of atrocities

committed by the JSTF in the name of capturing Veerappan. There are over 1000 recorded cases of gross human rights violations and long periods of illegal detention which the JSTF is responsible for."

Addressing the meeting, Annie Raja, national secretary, NFIW, said, "We are demanding that the NHRC intervene to grant interim compensation and rehabilitation to the victims. The Justice Sadashiva Panel report should be made public. Those responsible for these atrocities should be prosecuted and punished." Communist Party of India (CPI) national secretary D. Raja, said, "The JSTF had resorted to unprecedented torture. These are instances of a clear violation of human rights. The police cannot be given such powers."

• NHRC yet to make Sadashiva panel report public

• 'Over 1000 recorded cases of gross rights violations and long periods of illegal detention'

• 'The task force had resorted to unprecedented torture'