

**Civil society urges government to stop hate campaigns and protect human rights defenders**  
**21<sup>st</sup> March 2012**

In the backdrop of the resolution on Sri Lanka being discussed in Geneva and the expected vote on the resolution this week, the Sri Lanka Government and its propaganda teams have intensified an extremely malicious hate campaign against human rights defenders who express their views on accountability and governance issues in Sri Lanka.

In particular, government media units have constantly attacked Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, Dr. Nimalka Fernando, Ms. Sunila Abeysekera, Mr. Sunanda Deshapriya and Mr. J. C. Weliamuna calling them traitors, inciting extremist elements to attack them and as a result, making them vulnerable to physical attacks. Photo images of other press freedom activists such as Mr. Rohitha Bashana Abeygoonawardena, Mr. Sanath Balasooriya and Mr. Poddala Jayantha have also been shown in government media programmes. The present series of attacks have directly accused these human rights defenders of supporting the LTTE, of receiving money from the Tamil diaspora and of working against the interests of the country to obtain "dollars". The present attacks follow on from previous attacks by Government ministers and government media on the Free Media Movement, press freedom activists and the Bishop of Mannar.<sup>1</sup>

We note that none of these defenders, all of whom are presently or in the recent past been resident in Sri Lanka, have been legally charged in Sri Lanka. In fact, the Minister of Media has said that these are activities against which the legal framework of the country does not allow the government to file charges."<sup>2</sup> The same Minister, it is reported, has further said that those that bring the country into disrepute will not be forgiven by the nation<sup>3</sup> implying that a system of "justice" exists outside the established legal framework.

Ironically, these hate campaigns have come at a time when UN experts on human rights defenders are calling on governments to take steps to facilitate, rather than deter, civil society's safe and unimpeded access to the UN.<sup>4</sup> The President of the Human Rights Council, Ms. Laura Dupuy Lasserre, has expressed her concern about reports of State and other representatives using aggressive and/or insulting language against civil society representatives participating in the Council deliberations with a view to intimidate and harass them.<sup>5</sup>

We observe that such malicious attacks are carefully orchestrated by the authorities with the clear objective of deviating attention elsewhere when the human rights record of the government is being challenged nationally and internationally.

We, therefore, urge the President and Government to take immediate action to stop these attacks and ensure the safety of human rights defenders whether they engage in national level processes and/or in inter-governmental processes such as the UN Human Rights Council.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://transcurrents.com/news-views/archives/8602> and <http://transcurrents.com/news-views/archives/9414>

<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.ceylontoday.lk/news-detail.php?news\\_id=2001&news\\_category\\_id=16](http://www.ceylontoday.lk/news-detail.php?news_id=2001&news_category_id=16)

<sup>3</sup> See Dinmina, Sinhalese newspaper at [http://www.dinamina.lk/2012/01/26/\\_art.asp?fn=p1201261](http://www.dinamina.lk/2012/01/26/_art.asp?fn=p1201261)

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=11954&LangID=E>

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=11957&LangID=E>

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2. Rev. Fr. M. Sathivel
3. Rev. Fr. Sarath Iddamalgoda
4. Rev. Fr. V. Yogeswaran, s.j.
5. Rev. Fr. S. Maria Anthony, s.j.
6. Rev. Fr. Jeevaraj, s.j.
7. Rev. Fr. Antonthas Morais, s.j.
8. Rev. Fr. Jeyabalan Croos
9. Rev. Fr. Elil Rajan
10. Rev. Fr. Everest Dias
11. Rev. Fr. Bernard I. Alphonsus, Ex-Chairman, Justice and Peace Commission of Jaffna Diocese
12. Mr. Udaya Kalupathirana, INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre
13. Mr. Shantha Pathirana, Association of Family Members of Disappeared
14. Mr. Joseph Stalin, Ceylon Teachers Union
15. Mr. S. Sivagurunathan, Movement for Defense of Democratic Rights
16. Mr. Somapala Kandawinna, Movement for Defense of Democratic Rights
17. Mr. Wasantha Dissanayake, Movement for Defense of Democratic Rights
18. Mr. Mahinda Hatthaka, Movement for Defense of Democratic Rights
19. Mr. T. M. G. Wimal Fernando, Adviser –MDDR
20. Mr. Hans Billimoria, The Grassrooted Trust
21. Mr. Siva Pragasam, Workers' Solidarity Union & Citizens' Watch Network
22. Mr. Manjula Pathiraja, Attorney at Law, Free March
23. Mr. Gonneratne Wanninayake, Attorney at Law, Free March
24. Mr. Namal Rajapakse, Attorney at Law, Free March
25. Mr. Priyaranjana Jayasinghe, Attorney at Law, Free March
26. Mr. Ainslie Joseph, Convener of the Christian Alliance for Social Action
27. Ms. Nalini, Woman Human Rights Defender, Batticaloa
28. Ms. Shanthy A Satchithananthan, CEO, Viluthu
29. Mr. Chandra Kumarage, Lawyers for Democracy
30. Mr. Lal Wijenayake, Lawyers for Democracy
31. Ms. Rosanna Flamer-Caldera, EQUAL GROUND
32. Mr. K.S. Ratnavale, Director, Centre for Human Rights and Development
33. Mr. K.J. Brito Fernando, Families of the Disappeared
34. Mr. Philip Dissanayaka, Right to Life Human Right Center
35. Mr. Udaya Edirimanna, CMEV
36. Mr. D.M. Dissanayake, CMEV
37. Mr. Jagath Liyanaarachchi, CMEV
38. Mr. Sunil Jayasekera, Free Media Movement of Sri Lanka
39. Mr. Kumara Alagiyawanna - Journalist/Free Media Movement
40. Mr. Dharmasiri Lankapeli, General Secretary, Federation of Media Employees' Trade Unions
41. Mr. Kusal Perera, Journalist
42. Ms. Melani Manel Perera, Christian Women Journalist
43. Ms. Seetha Ranjanees - Free lance Journalist
44. Mr. T Jayasingam, Eastern University
45. Prof. Jayantha Seneviratne, University of Kelaniya
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47. Mr. Lakshan Dias, Attorney at Law
48. Mr. Sampath Pushpakumara, Attorney at Law

49. Prof. Kumar David
50. Dr. Philip Sethunga
51. Dr. Mario Gomez
52. Dr. Sumathy Sivamohan
53. Dr. Devanesan Nesiah
54. Mr. Lakshman Gunasekara
55. Ms. Sharmini Boyle
56. Ms. Hana Ibrahim
57. Mr. Shan Wijethunge
58. Mr. Thaha Muzammil
59. Mr. Freddy Gamage
60. Ms. Dilhara Pathirana
61. Ms. Deanne Uyangoda
62. Ms. D.I. Wickremesekera
63. Ms. Chulani Kodikara
64. Ms. Maryanne Mendis
65. Ms. Paba Menkie
66. Ms. Dulani Kulasinghe
67. Ms. Shreen Saroor
68. Ms. Priya Thangaraja
69. Ms. Jovita Arulanatham
70. Ms. Jenzila Majeed
71. Mr. Nilshan Fonseka
72. Mr. Mirak Raheem
73. Mr. Lanka Nesiah
74. Mr. Ruki Fernando
75. Mr. P. N. Singham
76. Mr. Lionel Guruge
77. Mr. Sanjana Hattotuwa
78. Mr. Suresh Kumar
79. Mr. Nigel V. Nugawela