

# URGENT ACTION

## SRI LANKAN ACTIVISTS THREATENED

On 2 March, a Sri Lankan news website, Lankanewsweb, published the names of human rights defenders and journalists featured on a list it alleged was compiled by a Sri Lankan intelligence unit. Amnesty International fears that the list was leaked to the press as part of a government campaign to intimidate those named on it, and stop them from speaking out against the authorities. Two male human rights defenders, Dr Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu and J. C. Weliamuna, are at particular risk.

The list names 35 media activists, NGO heads and individuals engaged in “international outreach” and grades them, apparently according to their importance to the intelligence services. Dr Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, Executive Director of the Sri Lankan NGO, the Centre for Policy Alternatives, and J.C. Weliamuna, Sri Lanka Director of international NGO Transparency International, have both been threatened previously and are graded as being of great interest to the intelligence services on the list. Other colleagues from their organizations are also named.

In September 2008, a grenade was thrown at the house of J.C. Weliamuna, damaging property but causing no injuries. That attack was thought to be in retaliation for his legal representation of clients in human rights cases where the Defence Ministry was implicated. Despite of demands from local and international human rights groups, there was no credible inquiry into this attack (see UA 277/08). Dr Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu received a death threat via an anonymous letter posted to his home in August 2009, which was linked to his human rights work.

On 8 March, the Asian Human Rights Commission reported that the government was planning to arrest J.C. Weliamuna in connection with reports Transparency International had issued during the presidential election campaign in December and January, alleging violation of election laws and misuse of public resources by the ruling party. In late January 2010, Sri Lankan government spokespeople were quoted in newspaper articles attacking suspected political opponents and other critics, including human rights defenders and journalists. In February Sri Lanka’s Foreign Minister accused NGOs of trying to “destabilize the country.” An article that appeared in the national daily newspaper, Sri Lanka Guardian, on 20 February reporting on a meeting between President Mahinda Rajapaksa and a group of ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party lawyers, mentioned J.C. Weliamuna, specifically, saying “something must be done about him.”

### PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in English, Sinhalese, Tamil, or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety and wellbeing of Dr. Saravanamuttu, J.C. Weliamuna and all those named on the list referred to in Lankanewsweb on 2 March;
- asking the Sri Lankan authorities to ensure that human rights defenders are able to continue their legitimate work without fear of harassment or intimidation.

### PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 20 APRIL 2010 TO:

President  
His Excellency the President  
 Mahinda Rajapaksa  
 Presidential Secretariat  
 Colombo 1, Sri Lanka  
 Fax: +94 11 2446657  
 Salutation: Your Excellency

Inspector General of Police (IGP)  
 Mahinda Balasuriya  
 New Secretariat  
 Colombo 1  
 Sri Lanka  
 Fax: +94 11 2 440440  
 Email: [igp@police.lk](mailto:igp@police.lk)  
 Salutation: Dear Inspector General

**AMNESTY**  
**INTERNATIONAL**



**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives of Sri Lanka accredited to your country.** Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.



# URGENT ACTION

## SRI LANKAN ACTIVISTS THREATENED

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

A government crackdown on human rights defenders and journalists has intensified since Sri Lanka's bitterly contested Presidential election concluded on 26 January, with the incumbent, President Mahinda Rajapaksa being reelected.

At least 14 media workers have been killed in Sri Lanka since the beginning of 2006. Others have been arbitrarily detained, tortured and allegedly disappeared while in the custody of security forces. More than 20 journalists have left the country in response to death threats. None of these attacks has been properly investigated or prosecuted.

Sri Lankan journalists have given Amnesty International a list of 56 of their colleagues who face serious threats, including some working for the government-owned Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation, as well as Independent Television Network, Lak Hada and the Lake House Group.

UA: 53/10 Index: ASA 37/005/2010 Issue Date: 10 March 2010

