

URGENT ACTION

TWO SRI LANKAN JOURNALISTS THREATENED

Two female editors at a national newspaper in Sri Lanka, Frederica Jansz and Munza Mushataq, have received death threats. The founder and former Editor-in-Chief of the newspaper, Lasantha Wickrematunge, was killed in January after receiving a similar death threat.

On 22 October, Frederica Jansz, Editor-in-Chief of the Sunday Leader, and the newspaper's News Editor, Munza Mushataq, received identical death threats by post, hand-written in red ink. Lasantha Wickrematunge was murdered three weeks after he received a similar death threat, also written in red ink.

The threats relate to the coverage by the Sunday Leader of a video, broadcast on UK TV station Channel Four in August, which allegedly showed Sri Lankan soldiers executing Tamil prisoners. The Sri Lankan government has stated that the video had been faked, but on 18 October the Sunday Leader printed an article on its front page, highlighting a report that an analysis of the video had concluded that the footage had not been tampered with or edited.

The threatening letters were postmarked 21 October, just three days after the newspaper ran its controversial story. Both letters included text saying "if you write anymore, we will kill you, [and] slice you into pieces". The journalists reported the threat to Sri Lanka's Inspector General of Police, and also to local police in the capital, Colombo. However, no action has yet been taken by the authorities.

In September, Dileesha Abeysundera, who works for the Sinhala-language edition of the Sunday Leader and also campaigns for greater press freedom in Sri Lanka, was threatened (see UA 269/09, ASA 37/021/2009). There have been numerous serious attacks on the staff of the Sunday Leader and its publishers. Its offices have been burnt down, bombed and sealed several times.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in English, Sinhalese, Tamil or your own language calling on Sri Lankan authorities;

- to ensure the safety of Frederica Jansz and Munza Mushtaq, in accordance with the wishes of the journalists themselves;
- to immediately investigate the death threats received by the two journalists on 22 October, and the attacks on other Sri Lankan journalists and media workers, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- to abolish or reform legislations that are being used to suppress the right to freedom of expression and put an end to the climate of impunity that has allowed a long campaign, by state agents and paramilitary groups, of intimidation and violence against independent journalists in Sri Lanka.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 8 DECEMBER 2009 TO:

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

Inspector General of Police
Jayantha Wickramaratne
Sri Lanka Police Headquarters
101/1 Kew Road, Colombo 2
Sri Lanka
Fax: + 94 11 244 6174
Salutation: Dear Inspector General

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.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Physical attacks and the relentless intimidation of journalists, as well as government-imposed restrictions on reporting, are threatening freedom of expression in Sri Lanka. Unprecedented levels of violence against media workers reporting stories critical of the government have contributed to a climate of fear and self-censorship that denies Sri Lankans the right to information. Journalist J.S. Tissainayagam was sentenced to 20 years rigorous imprisonment on 31 August 2009, on charges that his reporting on human rights issues promoted terrorism.

Numerous journalists have been detained while others have fled the country following death threats. At least 14 media workers have been killed since 2006. Investigations into the unlawful killings of journalists have failed to result in prosecutions.

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