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Sri Lanka: Launch Independent Inquiry into attack on National Human Rights Commission **Joint Press Release by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch**

(London, October 13) An independent investigation should be immediately launched into the attack on the National Human Rights Commission's (NHRC) headquarters in Colombo during the early morning hours of 12 October. The NHRC's offices were ransacked, files were destroyed and newspapers were set on fire. Kerosene was poured throughout the offices. Although the identity of the attackers is not yet clear, the attack represents a serious threat to the work of the NHRC.

"This appears to be an attempt to intimidate the NHRC, which is the most important human rights institution in Sri Lanka," said Natalie Hill, Deputy Programme Director of Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Programme. "Such intimidation must not be permitted. The authorities must take all necessary steps to ensure that the NHRC is able to carry out its work independently and in safety."

While the police have begun an investigation into the incident, the human rights organisations stressed that an independent inquiry is needed. As the NHRC is empowered to examine violations of rights by state actors, including the police, it is critical to appoint a neutral and competent body to investigate the intimidation and threat against the NHRC.

"Given the sensitive nature of the NHRC's investigations, which include alleged abuses by the police, it is necessary to undertake an independent inquiry into the attack and make the findings public," said Tejshree Thapa, South Asia researcher at Human Rights Watch.

Sri Lanka's NHRC was established in 1997 to independently investigate human rights abuses. It has recently been involved in documenting allegations of torture and extra-judicial killings by the police. The NHRC has publicly adopted a "zero tolerance" policy against police torture, and has established a special judge to examine the extrajudicial killings. The NHRC has also taken a very strong stand against the LTTE's recruitment of child soldiers.

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