

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
1 February 2010
AI Index: PRE 01/031/2010

Sri Lanka: End post-election clampdown on dissent

Amnesty International today called on the Sri Lankan government to end its crackdown on journalists, political activists and human rights defenders following last week's presidential election.

Opposition supporters and journalists have been arrested, several prominent newspaper editors have received death threats and trade unionists and opposition supporters have been harassed since the poll.

The Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) reported more than 85 post-election incidents, including two murders and several assaults. The CMEV has not released details of these incidents.

Pressure on government critics has been mounting since President Mahinda Rajapaksa was re-elected on 26 January, defeating his former Chief of Defence Staff, retired army general Sarath Fonseka.

"Victory against the Tamil Tigers followed by a historic election should have ended political repression in Sri Lanka but instead we have seen a serious clampdown on freedom of expression", said Madhu Malhotra, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Deputy Director.

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.

"Threats, beatings and arrests mean that Sri Lankan human rights activists live in fear of the consequences of expressing their political opinions," said Madhu Malhotra.

Security officials detained 13 former military officials supporting the defeated presidential candidate Gen Sarath Fonseka on 29 January during a raid on the candidate's campaign office. They are being held incommunicado, according to opposition lawyer Shiral Lakthilaka.

The government has accused Fonseka and his supporters of plotting a coup d'etat.

Also on 29 January, police officers from the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) raided the office of newspaper Lanka Irida and arrested chief editor Chandana Sirimalwatte, who remains in detention.

The newspaper had openly campaigned for opposition candidate Sarath Fonseka during the elections. The office was raided again the following day.

Offices of the popular internet site, Lanka E News, were sealed off by the authorities and Amnesty International received reports that a number of unidentified gunmen visited the Lanka E News office on at least two occasions during last week.

Sri Lankan journalist and political analyst Prageeth Eknaligoda, a contributor to the site, disappeared on his way home from work two days before the election and is still missing.

When his wife reported his disappearance to the Homagama police, she was herself detained for several hours. Eknaligoda had been actively reporting on political events in the run-up to the election and had recently spoken out in favour of Sarath Fonseka.

“President Rajapaksa’s government has to show that it will now try to deal with the human rights violations that have plagued Sri Lanka, instead of using the post-election period to launch a new crackdown,” said Madhu Malhotra.

Numerous serious assaults by unknown perpetrators against journalists have not been properly investigated or prosecuted. Amnesty International calls on the Sri Lankan authorities to change this pattern and demonstrate their commitment to human rights standards by ensuring the prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigation of these recent attacks.

Opposition supporters and journalists have been arrested, several prominent newspaper editors have received death threats and trade unionists and opposition supporters have been harassed following the election.

The Centre for Monitoring Election Violence reported more than 85 post election incidents, including two murders and several assaults. The CMEV has not released details of these incidents.

Pressure on government critics has been mounting since President Mahinda Rajapaksa was reelected on 26 January, defeating his former Chief of Defense Staff, retired army general Sarath Fonseka.

“Victory against the Tamil Tigers followed by a historic election should have ended political repression in Sri Lanka but instead we have seen a serious clampdown on freedom of expression”, said Madhu Malhotra Amnesty International Regional Deputy Director Asia-Pacific.

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

“Threats, beatings, and arrests mean that Sri Lankan human rights activists live in fear of the consequences of expressing their political opinions,” said Madhu Malhotra,

Security officials detained thirteen former military officials supporting the defeated Presidential candidate Gen Sarath Fonseka on 29 January during a raid on the candidate’s campaign office. They are being held incommunicado, according to opposition lawyer Shiral Lakthilaka.

The government has accused Fonseka and his supporters of plotting a coup d’etat.

Also on 29 January, police officers from the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) raided the office of newspaper Lanka Irida and arrested chief editor Chandana Sirimalwatte who remains in detention. The newspaper had openly campaigned for opposition candidate Sarath Fonseka during the elections. The office was raided again the following day.

Offices of the popular internet site Lanka E News was sealed off by the authorities and Amnesty International received reports that a number of unidentified gunmen visited the Lanka E news office on at least two occasions during last week.

Sri Lankan journalist and political analyst Prageeth Eknaligoda, a contributor to the site, disappeared on his way home from work two days before the election and is still missing. When his wife reported his disappearance to the Homagama police, she was herself detained for

several hours. Eknaligoda had been actively reporting on political events in the run-up to the election and had recently come out in favour of Sarath Fonseka

“President Rajapaksa’s government has to show that it will now try to deal with the human rights violations that have plagued Sri Lanka, instead of using the post election period to launch a new crackdown,” said Madhu Malotra.

Numerous serious assaults by unknown perpetrators against journalists have not been properly investigated or prosecuted. Amnesty International calls on the Sri Lankan authorities to change this pattern and demonstrate their commitment to human rights standards by ensuring the prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigation of these recent attacks.

END/

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or email: press@amnesty.org

International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW, UK
www.amnesty.org