

URGENT ACTION

HEALTH CONCERNS FOR DETAINED BLOGGER

Ramzy Razeek, a retired government official and social media commentator, has been detained since 9 April 2020 without charge, or proper access to lawyer. Suffering from several medical complications, his family is worried about his health conditions in the overcrowded and unhygienic prison facilities. Detained for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression, Ramzy Razeek must be immediately and unconditionally released, and all charges against him dropped.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Acting Inspector General of Police
Mr. Chandana Depal Wickramaratne
Police Headquarters,
Church Street,
Colombo 00100, Sri Lanka
Fax: +94 112 440440
Email: igp@police.lk

Dear Mr Wickramaratne

*I am deeply worried about the fate of **Ramzy Razeek**, who was arbitrarily detained on 9 April 2020 for simply exercising his right to peaceful freedom of expression on Facebook. Further to my concern is the fact that Ramzy's family have not been allowed to communicate with him since the arrest. With several health complications, including arthritis, kidney failure, liver problems and vasculitic leg ulcers, it is critical that he receives adequate access to healthcare.*

I understand that Ramzy Razeek filed a complaint through email to you at 11:04 AM on 9 April 2020 for death threats he received in response to recent social media posts on his private Facebook account. However, instead of thoroughly and effectively investigating the threats, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) arrested Ramzy for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression. According to his lawyers, the Police cited the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Act and Computer Crimes Act for his arrest.

The use of the ICCPR Act to detain and prosecute people for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression is a clear violation of international human rights law, and an infringement of the rights guaranteed by the constitution of Sri Lanka. It is appalling to see that the very law intended to protect human rights in Sri Lanka, is now being misused to violate them.

He is now at heightened risk due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As this devastating virus sweeps across the globe, prisons are at risk of becoming a very dangerous hotspot for COVID-19 outbreaks. It is more important than ever that states take urgent measures to protect all those who are deprived of their liberty, especially by releasing all individuals who are held simply for peacefully expressing their human rights.

I therefore, urge you to:

- ***Drop all charges against Ramzy Razeek and immediately and unconditionally release him,***
- ***Pending his release, provide him with adequate access to healthcare, and contact with family and lawyers. If contact visits are restricted due to COVID-19 preventive measures, they must be replaced with other means of contact, for example, by phone, emails or video calls.***
- ***Stop using ICCPR Act to threaten, harass and prosecute dissidents and activists for peacefully expressing their opinions.***

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ramzy Razeek, a retired government official from Katugastota in Kandy, central Sri Lanka, is a regular commentator on social and political affairs on his Facebook account. Through his posts, he has consistently advocated for inter-faith harmony, equality, justice and anti-racism. Ramzy was arrested from his house by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of police in the afternoon of 9 April 2020 allegedly for his opinions posted on Facebook.

A week before his arrest, on 2nd April, Ramzy had posted the following in his Facebook wall: "...Muslims have been surrounded on all sides by racist groups operating in the country in a manner that they are unable to face such an ideological war. The Muslim community remains shocked being unable to do anything in the face of intellectual attack...Muslims should immediately prepare for an ideological jihad (ideological struggle)...It is time to prepare for an ideological jihad (ideological struggle) for the country and all its citizens, using the pen and key-board as weapons. Muslims should focus more on helping people understand truth through an ideological struggle, using every available space, including the mainstream media and social media, to face the hate propaganda against Muslims, who are also people in this country. Nothing is impossible." It is believed the above post in particular and other previous posts led to his arrest.

Ramzy is reported to have received death threats from several people after his post on 2nd April, in response to which he had made a complaint to the Inspector General of Police on the morning of 9 April 2020. Ramzy also went into self-censorship and announced on 3rd April 2020 that he would refrain from posting anything related to politics or national problems to avoid endangering his children. Instead of taking actions against those who threatened him for his opinions, the Police arrested Ramzy.

Ramzy Razeek's hearing has been deferred multiple times, and he has been remanded until 28 May for his next hearing at the Magistrate in Colombo. According to Ramzy's lawyers, the Police had cited the ICCPR Act and Computer Crimes Act for his arrest. Lawyers or his family members have been restricted from visiting and communicating with him due to the ongoing COVID-19 restrictions. According to his family, Ramzy has several medical complications including arthritis, kidney failure, liver problems, cardiovascular diseases and wounds due to vasculitic leg ulcers, which need daily medicines, care and cleanliness to avoid further infections. This is one of the reasons for his early retirement from the Department of Agriculture.

This arbitrary use of the ICCPR Act in Sri Lanka – which amounts to misuse of an Act designated to protect, not violate human rights – has created a chilling effect in the country where several people including writers and activists have been detained for peacefully expressing their opinions. Under the ICCPR, which Sri Lanka is legally bound to implement, the rights to freedom of expression and of thought, conscience and religion may only be restricted in narrow, clearly defined circumstances. Restrictions are only permissible if they are provided by law; placed for the purpose of protecting certain public interests (national security or public safety, public order, protection of public health or morals) or the rights and freedoms of others; and demonstrably necessary for that purpose. Merely implicit or even explicit criticism of a religion or other belief system cannot be criminalized as incitement.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English or Sinhala

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 14 August 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Ramzy Razeek (He/Him/His)