



December 21, 2005

President of Sri Lanka, the Right Honourable Mahinda Rajapaksa
15/5, Baladaksha Mawatha, 3rd Floor
Colombo 3, Sri Lanka

Dear President Mahinda,

On behalf of the 250,000 Ontario members of the Canadian Federation of Students, I am writing you to express concern regarding the reported assaults on university students, faculty members, and administrators from Jaffna University during a peaceful protest in Sri Lanka's Jaffna Peninsula. In addition we understand that the Jaffna University Students' Council Office has been under surveillance by Sri Lankan armed forces for the last two weeks with many students themselves being interrogated and having their National Identity Cards confiscated.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental right. It is incumbent on the government of Sri Lanka to protect students' right to learn and express their viewpoints in a peaceful and safe environment. This means not only removing the military from within and around Jaffna University campus, but also ensuring that the basic necessities of learning are in place for all students. We understand, for example, that the largely Tamil student population at the Vavooniya campus of Jaffna University still does not have the proper infrastructure to properly conduct their learning.

Canadian college and university students strongly believe that a democratic citizenry is enhanced by universal access to education. We oppose any barriers that prevent students from accessing or properly participating in their education. If the above allegations are true they would constitute egregious violations of the rights of students in the Northern region of Sri Lanka and would deserve international attention.

Students in Canada still recall the reports of intimidation and torture of a student leader from the same university just 4 years ago. Our hope was that in the wake of that incident the Sri Lankan government would move toward reconciliation and that steps would be taken to ensure the safety of students, and indeed, all citizens. We are particularly disturbed, therefore, to hear similar stories of organised violence being perpetrated on students just this month. Canadian students look forward to your government's swift condemnation of any and all acts of violence against students and other members of Jaffna University.

Sincerely,

Jesse Greener
Ontario Chairperson

Canadian Federation of Students

Copied: Prime Minister Paul Martin (Canada), Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg (Norway)