



Tamil Information Centre

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Committed to Human Rights and Community Development

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Sri Lanka: Attacks on Human Rights Defenders Reaching Crisis Point

Tamil Information Centre (TIC) strongly condemns the attack on Muddiappu Remedious, the legal officer of the Centre for Human Rights and Development (CHRD) and the legal advisor of the Jaffna Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission (SL-HRC) on Friday, 02 February 2007. Mr Remedious was threatened and assaulted by a group of SLA soldiers near Stanley Road in Jaffna town despite him presenting his credentials as the Legal Officer for the SL-HRC.

Meanwhile, S. Surenthirarajah, the Co-ordinating Officer of the Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission, Jaffna also has registered a complaint with the Jaffna police that he has been subjected to continuous threats by persons associated with a political party. TIC's sources indicate that Surenthirarajah has been subjected to intimidation and threats previously by members of EPDP in Jaffna.

Despite commitments given by the Sri Lankan government, serious human rights violations continue to be committed in Sri Lanka and, in particular, human rights defenders are threatened, attacked and assassinated. In the vast majority of such cases, effective investigations have not been carried out and the perpetrators are never brought to account.

Intensified persecution of human rights activists in recent days has seriously undermined the Sri Lankan government's pledges to respect international human rights. These are pledges that the government made in its bid for membership on the UN Human Rights Council.

Since election of the new Presidency in 2005, the number of attacks against human rights defenders has increased dramatically, largely due to the failure to effectively prosecute such crimes.

Successive governments in Sri Lanka have failed to introduce credible mechanisms for accountability and performance at all levels of the administration. There is a general consensus within the human rights community in Sri Lanka that poor governance, corruption and nepotism have severely undermined the rule of law including safeguards in the Constitution to protect fundamental rights.

The present government has usually sought to justify its moves to humiliate, threaten, arrest and torture human rights defenders under the pretext that they are supporters of the LTTE.

Since independence, Sinhala dominated governments have routinely ignored human rights abuses against Tamil speaking people by the security forces allowing them impunity for such acts. At the same time an endemic failure on the part of the government and the opposition to engage in a constructive dialogue to reduce political tension in the country and strengthen the democratic process has further undermined safeguards against human rights violations.

Human rights defenders are critical in attempts to uncover and redress past human rights violations and advance meaningful reforms in Sri Lanka. Political will and commitment on the part of the Sri Lankan government and the international community is necessary to end the climate of impunity that surrounds attacks against human rights defenders.

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