

Press release – 10 July 2009

**UN STAFF UNION EXPRESSES CONCERN AT CONTINUING DETENTION
AND HARASSMENT OF STAFF IN SRI LANKA
Member States have obligations under international law
to respect independence and work of UN staff**

The United Nations Staff Union and its Standing Committee on the Security and Independence of the International Civil Service regret the continuing detention and harassment of United Nations staff members in Sri Lanka.

The actions by the Sri Lankan authorities against United Nations staff members in Sri Lanka violate international instruments dealing with the privileges, immunities and independence of United Nations officials. In particular, detained staff must not be held without charge and must be brought before a civilian court. The freedom of movement of United Nations staff to do their work must be ensured.

The recent action of Sri Lanka to detain two national staff members appears to be a campaign against United Nations personnel, which is illegal under international law. Authorities have been arresting, without explanation, United Nations staff members, initially refusing to provide access to them by United Nations officials.

On 20 June, the United Nations Country Team in Sri Lanka said that two of its national staff members, one from UNHCR and one from the United Nations Office for Project Services, had been arrested. The staff members had been reported as missing eight days earlier, after which it emerged that they had been taken into custody. The Country Team was not aware if any charges had been laid, nor of the details of any accusations, and requested details as to the basis on which the staff members were being held. The two men, both ethnic Sri Lankan Tamils, were working as drivers in the northern region of Vavuniya.

The Committee calls upon the Secretary-General to demand the Sri Lankan Government to release all United Nations staff members held without charge, not to restrict the movements of United Nations personnel and to respect the independence of all United Nations staff, in accordance with international law.

The Staff Union also requests the authorities in Sri Lanka to provide details on the staff members' well-being and reminds the Government that it is a party to the 1994 United Nations Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel and the 1946 Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations.

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