



Assault against Mr. Upali Tennakoon and his wife

LKA 002 / 0109 / OBS 015

Assault

Sri Lanka

January 27, 2009

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), requests your urgent intervention in the following situation in Sri Lanka.

Brief description of the situation:

The Observatory has been informed by reliable sources about the assault against **Mr. Upali Tennakoon**, Editor-in-chief of the privately-owned *Rivira*, a popular Sinhala weekly newspaper, known for his articles denouncing human rights abuses and corruption.

According to the information received, on January 23, 2009, at around 6:40 am, Mr. Upali Tennakoon and his wife Dhammika were attacked and wounded by four men on motorcycles who blocked their car in Imbulgoda, Kadawatha, outside the capital Colombo. The attackers had a knife, iron rods, and sticks. They smashed the windscreen and hit Mr. Tennakoon and his wife with sticks. They also stabbed them. Mr. Upali Tennakoon and his wife, who both sustained injuries, were brought to the Colombo National Hospital, where their health condition was said to be not critical. Mr. Tennakoon was treated for lacerations to the hands and forehead.

The Observatory condemns this attack against Mr. Upali Tennakoon and his wife, and underlines that it took place two weeks after the assassination of Mr. **Lasantha Wickrematunge**, founder and Chief Editor of the *Sunday Leader* newspaper as well as a lawyer who was a vocal critic of corruption and abuse of authority in Sri Lanka as well as of the Government policies relating to the conflict^[1]. Mr. Wickrematunga was killed as he drove to his office on the edge of Colombo, and his car was also blocked by unidentified gunmen on motorcycles.

Actions requested:

Please write to the authorities of Sri Lanka asking them to:

0. Guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of Mr. Upali Tennakoon, his family and all Sri Lankan human rights defenders;
0. Order a thorough and impartial investigation into the attack against Mr. Upali Tennakoon, in order to identify all those responsible, bring them before a civil competent and impartial tribunal and apply to them the penal sanctions provided by the law;
0. Put an end to all acts of harassment against all human rights defenders and humanitarian workers in Sri Lanka;
0. Conform with the provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 9, 1998, especially its Article 1, which states that “everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels”, and Article 12.2, which provides that “the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, *de facto* or *de jure* adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration”;
0. Ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments ratified by the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

Addresses:

- President Mahinda Rajapakse, Presidential Secretariat, Colombo 1, Sri Lanka, Fax: + 94 11 2446657 / +94 11 2472100 / +94 11 2430 590
- Mr. Amarasiri Dodangoda, Minister, Ministry of Justice and Law Reforms, Superior Courts Complex, Colombo 12, Sri Lanka. Fax : (94) 1 2320785. Email: justiceminist@sltnet.lk
- Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Secretary, Ministry of Defence, Public Security, Law and Order, 15/5 Baladaksha Mawatha, Colombo 3, Sri Lanka, Fax: +94 11 2446 300 / +94 11 2541 529. Email: gotabaya@defence.lk
- National Police Commission, 3rd Floor, Rotunda Towers, 109 Galle Road, Colombo 03, Sri Lanka, Fax: +94 11 2 395867 / +94 11-2395866. E-mail: npcgen@sltnet.lk / polcom@sltnet.lk
- Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, No. 36, Kynsey Road, Colombo 8, Sri Lanka. Tel: +94 11 2 694 925 / 673 806. Fax: +94 11 2 694 924 / 696 470. E-mail: sechrc@sltnet.lk
- His Excellency Mr. Dayan Jayatilleka, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations in Sri Lanka, 56 rue De Moillebeau, 5th Floor, 12119 Geneva 19, Switzerland, Fax: + 41-22 734 90 84, E-mail: mission.srilanka@ties.itu.int
- Embassy of Sri Lanka in Brussels, 27 rue Jules Lejeune, 1050 Ixelles, Belgium. Tel: + 32 2 344 53 94/ + 32 2 344 55 85. Fax : + 32 2 344 67 37. Email : sri.lanka@euronet.be

Please also write to the diplomatic mission or embassy of Sri Lanka in your respective country as well

as to the EU diplomatic missions or embassies in Sri Lanka.

Geneva - Paris, January 27, 2009

Kindly inform us of any action undertaken quoting the code of this appeal in your reply.

The Observatory, a FIDH and OMCT venture, is dedicated to the protection of Human Rights Defenders and aims to offer them concrete support in their time of need. The Observatory was the winner of the 1998 Human Rights Prize of the French Republic.

To contact the Observatory, call the emergency line:

E-mail: Appeals@fidh-omct.org

Tel and fax FIDH + 33 (0) 1 43 55 20 11 / +33 1 43 55 18 80

Tel and fax OMCT + 41 (0) 22 809 49 39 / + 41 22 809 49 29

[1] See Observatory Urgent Appeal LKA 001 / 0109 / OBS 006, issued on January 15, 2009.

L'OMCT a son siège à Genève, en Suisse. Elle coordonne le réseau SOS-Torture composé de 282 organisations régionales et internationales dans 93 pays sur cinq continents.

Contact : omct@omct.org