

URGENT ACTION

OUTSPOKEN FEMALE JOURNALIST UNDER THREAT

Journalist and media rights activist, Dileesha Abeyesundera is in danger after a gang of unidentified people threatened her and tried to forcefully gain access to her property in Sri Lanka.

On 28 September, at around 11.45pm, several unidentified people travelling in white vans attempted to break into Dileesha Abeyesundera's compound in the Borella district of the capital city, Colombo. The gang repeatedly banged on her gate whilst calling out her name. When she was asked who they were, ensuring that the gate was still locked and the door only slightly ajar, they said they were looking for Dileesha Abeyesundeera of the *Sunday Leader* newspaper. She told them that they had the wrong house and closed the door. The gang loitered for a few minutes until poor weather drove them away.

Dileesha Abeyesundera is an award winning journalist for the Sri Lankan newspaper, *Irundia* (part of The Leader Group) that is known for its highly critical coverage of the Sri Lankan government. She is also the Deputy Secretary of the Free Media Movement and Secretary of the National Forum for Journalists in Sri Lanka.

Dileesha Abeyesundera believes that the gang threatened her because of her work campaigning for media rights. She had organised and attended a meeting on 28 September, calling for the abolition of what she has publically stated as the 'draconian provisions in the Press Council Act.' The government has repeatedly defended the Press Council Act which has been used to violate the right to freedom of expression.

In Sri Lanka, at least 14 media workers have been killed since 2006. In June, Poddala Jayantha of the Sri Lankan Working Journalists Association was abducted and severely beaten by a group of armed men. Journalist Prageeth Ekneligoda was abducted on 27 August by a group who also arrived in a white van. White vans have been used in many abductions and enforced disappearances in Sri Lanka particularly since 2006, when state agents and paramilitary groups, that are allied to the government, stepped up attacks on critics of the government. Prageeth Ekneligoda was forcibly bundled into the van, blindfolded, handcuffed and taken to an unknown destination before being released the following day.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in English, Sinhalese, Tamil or your own language calling on Sri Lankan authorities;

- ✓ to ensure the safety of Dileesha Abeyesundera;
- ✓ to investigate the intimidation of Dileesha Abeyesundera and attacks on other Sri Lankan journalists and media workers;
- ✓ to abolish or reform legislations that are being used to suppress the right to freedom of expression and put an end to the climate of impunity that has allowed a long campaign, by state agents and paramilitary groups, of intimidation and violence against independent journalists in Sri Lanka

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 18 NOVEMBER 2009 TO:

His Excellency the President

Mahinda Rajapaksa
 Presidential Secretariat
 Colombo 1, Sri Lanka

Fax: +94 11 2446657

Salutation: Your Excellency

Inspector General of Police

Jayantha Wickramaratne
 Sri Lanka Police Headquarters
 101/1 Kew Road, Colombo 2
 Sri Lanka

Fax: + 94 11 244 6174

Salutation: Dear Inspector General

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
 INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Dileesha Aberysundera works for *Irudina* newspaper which is part of the The Leader Group. The group also includes *The Sunday Leader* and *The Morning Leader*. There have been numerous serious attacks on the staff and its publishers. In January 2009 Editor Lasantha Wickramatunga was murdered. Its offices have been burnt down, bombed and sealed.

Physical attacks and the relentless intimidation of journalists as well as government imposed restrictions on reporting are threatening freedom of expression in Sri Lanka. Unprecedented levels of violence against media workers engaged in critical reporting has contributed to a climate of fear and self-censorship that denies Sri Lankans the right to information. Journalist J.S. Tissainayagam was sentenced to 20 years rigorous imprisonment on 31 August 2009, on charges that his reporting on human rights issues promoted terrorism.

Numerous journalists have been detained while others have fled the country following death threats. At least 14 media workers have been killed since 2006. Investigations into the unlawful killings of journalists have failed to result in prosecutions.

The Press Council Act has reintroduced stringent provisions against press freedom. It allows for journalists to be prosecuted for contempt and sentenced to extended periods in prison, and prohibits the publication of materials related to government documents, the armed services, national security and economic policy.

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