

PUBLIC

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UA 277/08 Fear for safety

SRI LANKA J.C. Weliamuna (m), aged 47, human rights lawyer
His Family

Human rights lawyer J.C. Weliamuna and his family survived a grenade attack on their home in the capital, Colombo, on 27 September. He has since gone into hiding, as he remains at risk of further attack.

The grenade attack came at 11.40pm as J. C. Weliamuna, his wife and two sons, aged four months and two years, were asleep. The grenade exploded on the balcony of their bedroom though luckily they were not harmed. However, the explosion caused extensive damage to their home. Police found a second, unexploded grenade in the compound of the house and which they managed to defuse.

J.C. Weliamuna is the head of the Sri Lankan branch of Transparency International, an international NGO which campaigns against government corruption. On 23 September, the NGO published a report naming Sri Lanka as 92nd out of the list of 184 corrupt governments around the world. He also represents a number of citizens, who claim that state officials have violated their "fundamental human rights" under the Sri Lankan Constitution.

In September, J.C. Weliamuna had been the legal representative in a case involving serious police malpractice which was heard by the Supreme Court. As a result, the court ordered an investigation into police intimidation and the filing of false charges against his client. At 1.30 pm on 30 September, a man forced his way into J. C. Weliamuna's offices. He gave the name of an unknown person he claimed to be looking for. However, staff in the office believe he was really looking for J. C. Weliamuna.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

During 2008, at least 5 human rights defenders have reported receiving death threats, often in the form of threatening phone calls. The threats have been intended to stop them from speaking out on human rights issues. Attacks on journalists have included stabbings, abductions and ill-treatment as well as targeted killings. The Sri Lankan authorities have failed to prosecute any perpetrators for attacks on Human Rights Defenders in 2008. The latest attack on a prominent human rights lawyer sends a chilling message to anyone prepared to stand up and expose human rights violations.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Sinhalese, Tamil or your own language:

- urging the Sri-Lankan authorities to protect J.C. Weliamuna and his family, who survived a grenade attack on 27 September 2008, using all measures deemed appropriate by J.C. Weliamuna himself;
- calling on the authorities to order a full and impartial investigation by a competent authority into the attack, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice,
- asking them to ensure that human rights defenders are able to continue their legitimate work without fear of harassment or intimidation.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency the President Mahinda Rajapaksa

Presidential Secretariat
Colombo 1
Sri Lanka

Fax: +94 11 2446657
Salutation: Your Excellency

Hon. Sarath N. Silva
Chief Justice
Supreme Court of Sri Lanka
Superior Courts Complex
Colombo 12
Sri Lanka

Fax: +94 11 2435446
Salutation: Dear Chief Justice

Gotabhaya Rajapaksa
Ministry of Defence
Ministry of Defence, Public Security, Law and Order
15/5, Bauddhaloka Mawatha,
Colombo 03,
Sri Lanka

Fax: +94 11 254 1529
Salutation: Dear Minister

Jayantha Wickramaratne
Inspector General of Police
Sri Lanka Police
Headquarters
101/1 Kew Road
Colombo 2
Sri Lanka

Fax: + 94 11 244 6174
Salutation: Dear Inspector General

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Sri Lanka accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 13 November 2008.