

Human Rights Defenders Alert - India

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Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders,
Mrs. Margaret Sekaggya
c/o Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights – Palais Wilson
United Nations Office at Geneva
CH 1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland
Email: urgent-action@ohchr.org

Dear Ma'am,

Sub: *HRD Alert - India - Urgent Appeal for Action - Srilanka: Three Human Rights Defenders are under threats and pressure for defeating impunity and raising their voices against human rights violations in their country - Reg*

Greetings from Human Rights Defenders Alert - India!

HRD Alert - India is a Forum of Human Rights Defenders for Human Rights Defenders. It endeavours to initiate actions on behalf of Human Rights Defenders under threat or with security concerns.

We are now writing to express our grave concern regarding the allegations of threats; pressure faced by the human rights defenders Sunila, Nimalka and Dr. Saravanamuttu, for raising their voices against the accountability, impunity against the Srilankan Government.

Incident

According to the information received, three Sri Lankan human rights defenders Sunila Abeysekara, Nimalka Fernando and Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu are actively engaged in the work to defeat impunity in Sri Lanka and to build a strong system of justice and accountability for human rights violations, whether committed in the past or in the present and they remain committed to the ideals and to their goals. At present they are

participating in the on-going 19th session of the United Nations Human rights Council in Geneva from the past week, though they are under the attack by the state media in Sri Lanka.

The conduct of the government of Sri Lanka and the institutions and agencies under its control whenever disregard for the human rights obligations imposed on the government by virtue of its being signatory to almost all international human rights conventions comes to their attention. As the President of Sri Lanka and his Special Envoy on Human Rights well know, the three of them have offered their services to the government to ensure human rights accountability in the past. For example, all of them served on the National Advisory Council appointed by Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe, when he held the portfolio for Human Rights.

These human rights defenders worked with a range of human rights organizations, nationally, regionally and internationally, to draw attention to human rights violations in Sri Lanka as well as to the culture of impunity and the lack of accountability for violations of the past and of the present. This is their right, as human rights defenders, and they have exercised that right for many years, under various governments, in spite of a barrage of attacks and intimidation from various quarters, including state and non-state entities.

This attack is totally counter-productive in terms of the government's campaign to resist the Resolution on Sri Lanka, which has been tabled at the Council. In fact, in Geneva, there is more focus on the attacks and acts of intimidation of Sri Lankan human rights defenders than there is on the negotiations around the Resolution. Those who accuse them of bringing the country into disrepute would do well to examine both their motives and the consequences of their actions. Instead of carrying on with advocacy for defeating the Resolution, Sri Lanka's ambassador to the Council, Ms. Tamara Kunanayagam has had to spend hours of her valuable time talking to delegations, to the President of the Council and to officials of the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights about the campaign of intimidation

and attack against Sri Lankan human rights defenders at the Council and in Sri Lanka.

They have also addressed in the Side Event which took place in UN Human Rights Council Geneva on March 6, 2012 which was chaired by Mr. Henri Tiphagne, Hon'ble National Working Secretary Human Rights Defenders Alert - India. Finally they assured that for them whether there is a Resolution on Sri Lanka at the UN Human rights Council or not, their work to defend human rights in Sri Lanka must, and will, go on.

Appeal

We, therefore, urge you to immediately take necessary steps to:

1. Immediately ensure physical and psychological safety and integrity to the Messers. Sunila Abeysekara, Nimalka Fernando and Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu;
2. Ensure that the Srilankan government should stop the state attack for raising their voices for a genuine cause;
3. Provide the space and mobility for them to enter the country after attending the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva and to pursue their human rights work;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that the human rights defenders in Srilanka are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment

Looking forward to your immediate action in this regard,

Yours sincerely,

Henri Tiphagne

Hon'ble National Working Secretary

Human Rights Defenders Alert - India

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