

Media release

# Sri Lanka: Smear campaign against dissident voices

Saturday 31 March 2012, by [AMO, JAYASEKARA Sunil](#) (Date first published: 31 March 2012).

The Alliance of Media Organizations is disturbed by the recent wave of hate speeches and slanderous personal attacks directed against media personnel and human rights activists in the country, in the aftermath of the United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution on Sri Lanka.

Last week, Minister Mervyn Silva, addressing a public rally, threatened to 'break the limbs' of government critics Sunanda Deshapriya, Nimalka Fernando and Pakiasothy Saravanamuttu 'in public'. He also gloated that he was responsible for an earlier attack on the former president of the Sri Lanka Working Journalist Association (SLWJA), exiled journalist Poddala Jayantha, who was abducted and had both his legs broken by his abductors.

On 27 March, Minister Silva reiterated his threat and suggested that 'traitors be executed'.

In a climate of increasing intolerance and jingoism, state media are conducting a malicious smear campaign against critics of the current regime, including media activists. SLWJA President Gnanasiri Koththigoda, for instance, has been targeted in a sinister character assassination campaign by the government controlled television channel, ITN.

On its news telecast on 22 March, ITN stated it would soon be exposing a 'traitor', while showing pictures of Koththigoda in the background. The news anchor noted that a group of 'media traitors' had earlier fled the country, and added that the government controlled news channel would soon be exposing another 'traitor' who had been aiding and abetting the Tamil Diaspora through his news reporting from Colombo.

On 23 March, Koththigoda complained to Media Minister Lakshman Yapa Abeywardene about the malicious personal attack levelled against him by ITN. Minister Abeywardene contacted Sudarman Raddeligida, the disgraced news director of the ITN who had previously unsuccessfully contested to be elected to Parliament on the ruling party ticket. After a conversation with Raddeligoda, the Minister assured Koththigoda that all personal attacks would cease forthwith. However, in spite of such assurances, ITN has been continuing with its smear campaign against Koththigoda.

The ITN programme is part of a government orchestrated campaign of discrediting dissenting voices. Given the degree of impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of attacks against media, as evidenced by Minister Mervyn Silva's crowing about of the attack on our colleague Poddala Jayantha, the Alliance of Media Organizations is deeply concerned about the recent personal attacks directed against media personnel and rights activists including our colleague Gnanasiri Koththigoda. We are worried such attempts at character assassinations could well be a precursor to something far more ghastly.

We call on the government to end the manifold threats directed against its critics, including media personnel. We believe it would be in the interest of Sri Lanka, should the government direct its

energies to foster a more tolerant and pluralistic society.

**Sunil Jayasekara**

**On behalf of the Alliance of Media Organizations**

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