

Sri Lanka: Protecting the Politicat Rights of Comrade Kumar Gunaratnam, Frontline Socialist Party politburo member

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Maithripala Sirisena,
Honourable President,
Presidential Secretariat,
Colombo - 01,
Sri Lanka

Hon. President,

Protecting the Politicat Rights of Comrade Kumar Gunaratnam

Frontline Socialist Party politburo member comrade Kumar Gunaratnam has been sentenced to a one-year prison term charged with violation of immigration and emigration laws, while the government has as yet failed to respond to the request made by him regarding obtaining Lankan citizenship by renouncing his Australian citizenship. Comrade Kumar Gunaratnam was forced to leave the country due to direct threats on his life under the anti-democratic conditions that prevailed. This same situation was the reason that forced him to seek exile by violating existing immigration and emigration laws. However, securing his citizenship rights, as a person who was born in Lanka, who engaged in politics in Lanka, and who is a citizen of Lanka, is necessary, since it reflects the securing of a basic democratic right of the society. But the present government has not yet stated its stance on this political issue. Meanwhile, he is arrested and a plan to deport him is put into operation.

During the recent past, an anti-democratic condition prevailed within the country. Political opponents of the existing government were repressed. Official military establishments of the State as well as paramilitary groups were retained as means of repression. A large number of individuals were subjected to abductions and disappearances, and a situation emerged where political assassinations became normalized. This repression was carried out on a broad spectrum ranging from the urban working class masses, to journalists, political activists and social figures. Many political activists and journalists were forced to leave the country and into exile. Some of those who remained were killed or made to disappear. Political activists such as Lalith, Kugan, and journalists such as Lasantha, Ekneligoda, are examples for these. Therefore due to the anti-democratic condition that arose within the country, where many were unable to engage in politics with assurance of their safety, every one of them were forced to follow various means towards securing that safety. Comrade Kumar Gunaratnam was also forced to leave the country as a direct result of that anti-democratic condition. There was a very serious threat against his safety, and in 2011 his abduction and the attempt on his life, proved the presence of such a risk.

But now, it is becoming apparent that the new government is preparing to take away his right to engage in politics within Lanka, by using law as a scapegoat. On one hand, the government invites all those who left Lanka due to the anti-democratic condition that prevailed to return, while on the

other, it attempts to suppress or to exile those who already returned, by the means of law. Numerous incidents of killings, abductions, torture, financial fraud, are being reported, although no action has been taken against those who are accused. Meanwhile, comrade Kumar Gunaratnam's issue is made a priority backed by a strong interference by the State. This is similar to the practice of the last regime where the law was used as a means to extract political revenge. Officials from the Department of Immigration and Emigration had accepted in front of the courts that they had disregarded the application, lodged by comrade Kumar Gunaratnam on January 31st of 2015 requesting an extension of his visa, and the applications lodged on February 18th of 2015 and November 2nd of 2015 requesting ancestral Lankan citizenship, under intervention from the State Defence Ministry and the Ministry of Law and Order. Therefore the connection of the government within this repressive chain of events is made clear. Although the government gave promises on democracy before being elected, those promises are being violated within a very short period of time. To be democratic does not mean letting only those who entertain political views favouring ones own views to engage in politics, but also to accept that right of all who hold opposing political views. The previous Rajapakse regime curtailed the rights of persons and organizations that held opposing political views. In the incident regarding comrade Kumar Gunaratnam, it was made clear that the present government that came to power on promises of change, is also engaged in similar practices.

This is a grave attack on the democratic rights of the people of the country. This situation must be defeated, and the rights of everyone who wish to live and to engage in politics in Lanka must be protected. That is not merely a question of comrade Kumar Gunaratnam, but a question of all those who were forced into exile by the anti-democratic surroundings which prevailed. Therefore while we expect a swift intervention by you in this matter, we request an end to the acts of revenge exercised, using law as scapegoat, on comrade Kumar Gunaratnam and all those who were forced into exile by the repressive surrounding that existed, and to establish their Lankan citizenship.

Frontline Socialist Party
