

Media freedom in Sri Lanka

Situation in brief and points for follow up

1st Oct. 2009

- **The culture of impunity**

A disturbing culture of impunity protects those who threaten media freedom. Not a single attack on media and journalists has been investigated to an end and culprits have not been brought to the book.

- **Growing hate speech, intolerance and incitement to violence**

There is a growth of hate speech and incitement to violence by political forces. Dissenting voices are branded as supports of terrorism. A Minister in the incumbent government publicly advocated the brutal suppression of democratic dissent through extrajudicial ways.

- **Imprisonment of journalist Tissainayagam**

Journalist J. Tissainayagam was sentenced to 20 years hard labour for two articles he wrote and published during the cease fire period between Sri Lanka Government and the LTTE. He was tried under draconian anti terror legislation PTA. (see detailed annex)

- **Anti-terrorism and emergency regulations gags free media**

The Emergency regulations poses a serious threat to freedom of expression and opinion in Sri Lanka and these laws have resulted in journalists and media personnel being arbitrarily arrested, detained and questioned by the Police.

The Special Rapportuer may ask for a update about the commitment made by the Sri Lankan government to invite him for a formal country visit.

By inviting the Special Rapporteur to visit Sri Lanka the Government of Sri Lanka can reaffirm its commitment to media freedom in Sri Lanka.

European Union could assist to implement the urgent recommendations made by the International Freedom of Expression Mission to Sri Lanka in October 2006, namely:

- *Immediately halt* to all threats, harassment, abductions and attacks against media practitioners and outlets currently being perpetrated by all parties to the conflict;
- *Ensure* complete, transparent and timely investigations into the murder of media practitioners and death threats issued against media practitioners and their families;
- *Halt* the dangerous practice of publicly vilifying media practitioners;
- *Reverse actions already undertaken* that restricts press freedom and freedom of expression and prevent any moves to introduce any form of direct or indirect censorship

