

26 January 2007

Your Excellency,

We are writing to express our serious concern at the acute shortage of newsprint and printing ink in Jaffna and the implications this has on the ability of people in that region of Sri Lanka to access the news.

Reportedly there has been no road connection between Colombo and Jaffna since the main A9 road was closed last year due to heavy fighting. The commissioner for essential services has so far refused to load newsprint and ink onto the few ships carrying supplies to Jaffna.

This has resulted in severe hardships for newspapers in Jaffna. According to our reports, all three newspapers in the city now print only four pages and print runs have also been drastically reduced. For example, *Uthayan*, Jaffna's best-selling paper, used to print 12 pages and sell about 20,000 copies, whereas it now prints only 7,500 copies of four pages and will reportedly soon have to reduce further to just two pages. *Uthayan* may have to close in about one month if it does not receive supplies of newsprint and ink.

We respectfully remind you that there are no radio or TV stations in Jaffna and the only way people in the region are able to get news is through newspapers.

As you will be aware, access to information is a key element in ensuring stability, and the lack thereof may lead to exaggerated rumour replacing accountable journalism as the main source of news for the local population, thereby fuelling instability and violence.

We respectfully call on you to do everything possible to enable the delivery of newsprint to Jaffna so that the city's publications are able to carry out their vital activity of informing the public. In particular, we request that newsprint be included among the supplies carried into Jaffna.

We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours Sincerely,

Members of the International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression Mission to Sri Lanka

Those organisations associated with the International Mission include:

ARTICLE 19

FreeVoice

International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)

International Media Support (IMS)

International Press Institute (IPI)

International News Safety Institute (INSI)

Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

South Asia Press Commission (SAPC)

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC)

World Association of Newspapers (WAN)

World Press Freedom Committee (WPFC)