



## PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release – 26 January 2007

### **Acute shortage of newsprint in Jaffna undermines freedom of expression**

**ARTICLE 19 and the 11 other members of the International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression Mission to Sri Lanka have written to the Sri Lankan authorities in advance of next week's Tokyo Donors Conference, to be held in Galle, urging them to allow newsprint and ink to be transported into Jaffna, so that the city's publications are able to carry out their vital activity of informing the public. A copy of the letter has also been sent to the participants of the Tokyo Donors conference. Toby Mendel, ARTICLE 19 Law and Asia Programmes Director, said:**

*“People living in Jaffna are being starved of local news. The free flow of information is particularly critical in the context of a conflict, when people are prone to act on rumours and misinformation. These supplies are not a luxury, they are a necessity.”*

There are no radio or TV stations in Jaffna and the primary people in the region are able to get local news is through newspapers. Regular road connections between Colombo and Jaffna were closed last year due to heavy fighting and the commissioner for essential services has so far refused to load newsprint and ink onto ships carrying supplies to Jaffna. This has created severe problems for local newspapers. According to our information, all three newspapers have had to cut back dramatically on both length and print run. For example, *Uthayan*, Jaffna's bestselling paper, used to print 12 pages and sell about 20,000 copies, whereas it now prints only 7,500 copies of four pages.

Access to information is key to ensuring stability and to promoting peace. In particular, in the absence of accountable journalism, rumours, often ill-founded, may become the main source of news for the local population, fuelling instability and violence.

#### **Background**

Despite a Norwegian-brokered ceasefire in 2002, the nearly two decade old conflict between the government and the Tamil Tigers flared in April 2006. This has resulted in serious threats to journalists, particularly those operating in the North and East of the country, where Tamils are a majority and where the fighting has been concentrated. With the media divided along ethnic lines, the Tamil media has been particularly badly affected, including by murders, attacks and threats.

#### **Note to editors:**

- For more information, please contact Catrina Pickering, Programme Officer, ARTICLE 19, +44 20 7278 9292, [catrina@article19.org](mailto:catrina@article19.org) The letter is available at: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/letters/sri-lanka-jaffna-letter.pdf>
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.
- Members of the International Mission: 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).