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PRESS RELEASE

Sri Lanka: Journalists Still Under Threat, Even As Conflict Ends

ARTICLE 19 is concerned that Sri Lankan journalists remain under threat, despite the official ending of the country's decades-long civil conflict in May this year. Two editors from the Sri Lankan newspaper *The Sunday Leader*, Frederica Jansz and Munza Mushataq, are the latest to receive death threats, handwritten in red ink and delivered on 22 October.

The death threats arrived after the paper published a report on video footage allegedly showing Sri Lankan government soldiers executing Tamil prisoners. The footage, which was broadcast in the UK on Channel Four news, was deemed inauthentic by the government. However, *The Sunday Leader* ran a technical report from the USA stating that it had not been faked.

The Sunday Leader's previous editor, Lasantha Wickrematunge was assassinated in January this year, three weeks after receiving a similar letter. After his death, *The Sunday Leader* published a posthumous editorial by Wickrematunge in which he blamed the Sri Lankan Government for attacks on journalists. He wrote: "*Electronic and print media institutions have been burnt, bombed, sealed and coerced. Countless journalists have been harassed, threatened and killed. It has been my honour to belong to all those categories and now especially the last.*"

The Sunday Leader's managing editor Lal Wickrematunge told ARTICLE 19 today that they have lodged an official complaint and written to President Mahinda Rajapaksa this morning.

Journalist and former Convener of the Sri Lankan Free Media Movement Uvindu Kurukulasuriya comments: "*The Sri Lankan government has failed to investigate the murder of Lasantha and bring his killers to justice and now there are the same death threats against his successors.*"

ARTICLE 19 calls on the Sri Lankan government to immediately investigate the death threats against *The Sunday Leader* editor-in-chief Frederica Jansz and news editor Munza Mushataq, and to ensure the safety of both women.

"*It is completely unacceptable to subject journalists and editors to the kind of violence and harassment that has become so commonplace in Sri Lanka,*" comments Dr Agnès Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director. "*The Sri Lankan government must take responsibility for the safety of working journalists and must ensure that the country's commitment to the rule of international and domestic law is upheld.*"

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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- 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.