

December 10, International Human Rights Day

This December 10, 2010 marks the 62nd anniversary of the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Despite the passing of the Declaration of Human Rights, the wide-spread violations of human rights continues to exist in countries around the world regardless if they are from the global south or global north. The UN Declaration states **“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this rights includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers” – Article 19.** On this December 10 CUPE Ontario’s International Solidarity Committee is thinking about the ongoing situation in Sri Lanka and the right of freedom of the press.

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UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Navanethem Pillay in her address on March 2010 in Geneva, stated that *“In Sri Lanka the opportunity for peace and reconciliation continues to be marred by the treatment of journalists, human rights activists and other critics of the Government.”*

Since 2005, when the current Sri Lankan President took office, attacks on journalists and media institutions including raids and forced closure of media offices have rapidly increased. Over 20 media workers including journalists were abducted and killed. In January 8th 2009, the cold-blooded murder of well-known journalist Lasantha Wickrematunge occurred in broad day light, and the journalist J.S. Tissanayagam was sentenced to 20 years of hard labour for writing two articles about the sufferings of the Tamil people during the war. Prageeth Ekneligoda, a journalist was disappeared on January 24, 2010, two days before the Presidential election. More than ten months passed after his disappearance, his whereabouts remain unknown and the police have so far failed to make any inquiry findings to the public. His disappearance occurred shortly after he wrote two articles supporting the opposition candidate of the presidential election. These incidents stand as undeniable evidence of the suppression of the press and media-freedom in Sri Lanka.

The harassment and intimidation in Sri Lanka goes beyond media workers and journalists, Mrs. Bandara Menike has been harassed on October 22, 2010 by group of persons in civilian cloths and police uniforms because she is happened be the mother of Mr. Jayampathi Bulathsinhala - a printer and human rights activist, who was arrested two months ago over printing of an opposition poster. Also on August 08th the police had arrested Mr. Bulathsinhala’s wife Kumuduni and her two brothers and detained them as hostages, later they were release on bail.

On Wednesday November 17, 2010, a London (UK) based Tamil Journalist, a British Passport holder; Karthigesu Thirulogasundar was arrested at the Colombo International Airport, while he was hoping to visit his aging mother in Sri Lanka. He is currently being held in an undisclosed location.

It is important to note that currently over 50 journalists both Sinhalese and Tamils are in exile in order to protect their lives from abduction and involuntary disappearances.

In reflecting on this current situation, the International Solidarity Committee of the CUPE Ontario strongly urges all CUPE Ontario locals, on this year Human Rights’ occasion, to stand in solidarity with the Sri Lankan Journalists who are advocating for human rights. To express your solidarity, please send letters of concern of treating journalists to:

Sri Lankan High Commission
333 Laurier Avenue West Suite # 1204
Ottawa, Ontario