

June 29, 2009

## **Media Release – Abduction of Krishni Ifham**

We, the undersigned women from civil society organisations and media institutions, are shocked and deeply concerned about the abduction of journalist Krishni Ifham, from her home in Wattala, by a group of armed men on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2009.

Continuing the pattern of insidious abductions, Ms. Ifham too was taken away blindfolded in a white van. She was interrogated and later released in Kandy. Ms. Ifham says that her abductors alleged they were from the police. She also says she has reportedly been threatened by unknown persons in April 2008 and February 2009 in relation to her work on press freedom.

A journalist of 14 years, Ms. Ifham has won awards for Best Journalist of the Year (Tamil) by the Editors Guild on more than one occasion.

This appalling violation of the rights of a journalist to pursue her profession without harm or hindrance underscores again the blatant disregard for due process and the rule of law. White van abductions and violent attacks on journalists are now commonplace in Sri Lanka.

In a somewhat similar incident Sudar Oli editor N. Vidyatharan was snatched in broad daylight without an arrest warrant by men in a white van and was found to be questioned and arrested by a special branch of the police in February this year. In early June Poddala Jayantha, General Secretary of the Working Journalists Association was abducted in a white van and brutally attacked; he is still being treated for his injuries. We believe that this is a continuing pattern of violence and discrimination against media personnel enabling the state to curb dissent.

We are also concerned at the increased targeting of women media personnel. In November 2006 Parameswari Maunasami, a reporter for the Sinhala-language weekly *Mawbima*, was abducted (later justified by the state as an arrest) and held without charge or trial for close to a year. Ms. V Vallarmathy, wife of E-Kwality Printers owner N. Jesiharan has been detained since March 2008 together with her husband and senior journalist Tissanayagam. They have become the first media personnel to be charged under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, setting a dangerous precedent for the harassment of the media everywhere.

Despite local and international condemnation and calls for action the State has failed to take effective measures to prevent these serious violations of human rights resulting in a climate of impunity, fear and a suppression of media freedom.

We call upon the government to protect the rights of all media personnel, follow due process and to take concrete steps to protect media workers and ensure the free and safe exercise of press freedom.

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