

12th May 2022

People's Tribunal on the Murder of Journalists in Sri Lanka – 12 & 13 May in The Hague

We, the undersigned Sri Lankans and organizations welcome and extend our support to the People's Tribunal on the Murder of Journalists which began last year in the Hague, with the hearing in relation to Sri Lanka being held today and tomorrow in the Hague.

Since the early 1980s, many journalists have been killed, subjected to enforced disappearances, assaulted, threatened and intimidated over decades, under different governments in Sri Lanka. There has been very little progress in pursuing justice for these serious crimes despite regular changes of governments. Not a single person has been convicted for crimes against journalists and only two cases have reached the prosecution stage. In one of these, more than 20 years after the murder of journalist Mylvaganam Nimalarajan in Jaffna in October 2000, the Attorney General has instructed the courts not to continue the case against the suspects. In the other case, the 2010 January enforced disappearance of journalist Prageeth Ekneligoda, indictments were filed in November 2019, but progress of the case has been painfully slow and there have been many setbacks, in relation to a key eyewitness, key investigators etc.

It is in this context that the People's Tribunal will consider the context for impunity for crimes against journalists in Sri Lanka today, 12th May, including governments' role in preventing and investigating crimes against journalists. Understanding the historical contexts and anti-dissent, anti-media freedom attitudes and policies of rulers in Sri Lanka, as well as entrenched majoritarianism and ethnic polarizations is crucial in pursuing justice for crimes against journalists in Sri Lanka.

The hearing tomorrow, 13th May will focus on the January 2009 murder of Editor and Journalist Lasantha Wickramatunge, one of the emblematic cases of killing of journalists and impunity. Lasantha's daughter had already sought international initiatives to seek justice, including the filing of a case in the United States in 2019 and a complaint to the UN Human Rights Committee in 2021, in context of lack of justice in Sri Lanka for over a decade.

We hope the success of the Tribunal could contribute towards keeping alive hopes of at least some survivors, victims' families and concerned persons about justice for these crimes. The International People's Tribunal also could be an opportunity for Sri Lankans, especially media institutions, to reflect on what we have done and failed to do in protecting our journalists and ensuring accountability for crimes against journalists.

The Tribunal coincides with an unprecedented people's struggles triggered by an unprecedented economic crisis in Sri Lanka. The murder of Lasantha and serious crimes against other journalists and lack of accountability has also featured prominently in these struggles.

Safe, free and enabling environment for independent journalism and freedom of expression and opinion is crucial as Sri Lankans grapple with the massive economic crisis and seek radical political reform. For this, accountability for serious crimes against journalists is essential. While recognizing that much of these struggles must continue to be waged in Sri Lanka, we also recognize the importance of international attention and support, and hope the Peoples Tribunal will be able to make a significant contribution towards this.

Information to follow the Tribunal:

The Tribunal proceedings will be live streamed from <https://ptmurderofjournalists.org/> from 12.30pm Colombo time till about 8.30pm Colombo time on 12th and 13th May.

Interpretations to Sinhalese and Tamil will be made available through <https://interpret.world/loginlink?token=HqFC0DT9>

The indictment is available at <https://ptmurderofjournalists.org/indictment/> (Pages 12 -14 for Sri Lanka)

More details at <https://ptmurderofjournalists.org/sri-lanka-case-hearing-on-the-murder-of-journalist-lasantha-wickrematunge/> (@SaferTruth)

Endorsing organizations

1. All Party Strugglers
2. Centre for Society and Religion
3. Digital Media Movement
4. Federation of Media Employees Trade Unions
5. Free Media Movement of Sri Lanka
6. International Centre for Ethnic Studies
7. Mullaitivu Press Club
8. South Asia Women in Media
9. Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association
10. Sri Lanka Young Journalists Association
11. Women and Media Collective

Endorsing persons

1. A. Sornalingam
2. Alvin Sallay
3. Anupama Ranawana
4. Anushya Collure
5. Arjuna Ranawana
6. B. Gowthaman
7. Christine Seneviratne
8. Deekshya Illangasinghe
9. Dharmasiri Lankapeli
10. Dilrukshi Handunnetti, Journalist, Attorney-at-Law
11. Dinitha Rathnayake, Journalist
12. Duminda Sampath
13. Hana Ibrahim, Journalist
14. Jan Droop
15. Jennifer Barthelôt
16. June Barthelôt
17. Kshama Ranawana
18. Kumanan Kanapathippillai, journalist
19. Kumudini Samuel
20. Lasantha De Silva, journalist, Convener, Free Media Movement
21. Lasantha Ruhunage, journalist
22. Lawrence Machado
23. Lucille Abeykoon
24. Maneshka Borham, journalist
25. Mario Gomez
26. M F M Fazeer
27. Melani Manel Perera, journalist
28. Minoli de Soysa, editor
29. Noelene Seneviratne
30. Olivia Seneviratne
31. Pon Singham
32. Prof. Arjuna Parakrama, University of Peradeniya
33. Prof. Chandraguptha Thenuwara
34. Prof. Jayadeva Uyangoda

35. Raine Wicks
36. Raveendrini Seneviratne
37. Reka Nilukshi
38. Rev. Fr. Jeyabalan Croos
39. Rev. Fr. Sherad Jayawardane
40. Ruki Fernando
41. Ruwan Laknath Jayakody, journalist
42. Selvaraja Rajasegar, editor of Maatram.org
43. Shalika Wimalasena
44. Shalindra Seneviratne
45. Shanker Pragnaratne
46. Shanmugam Thavaseelan, journalist
47. Sheree Jay
48. Shihar Aneez, journalist
49. Shyamala Gomez, Executive Director, Centre for Equality and Justice
50. Sirany Thevakumar, Rights Activist
51. Sr Deepa Fernando, HF
52. Sunanda Deshapriya, journalist, writer and human rights activist
53. Suren Perera, Attorney-at-Law
54. Tharindu Jayawardhana
55. Tharindu Uduwaragedera
56. Ven. Fr. Samuel J Ponniah (Church of Ceylon, Diocese of Colombo)