

URGENT ACTION

POET DETAINED FOR ONE YEAR WITHOUT CHARGE

Ahnaf Jazeem, a 26-year-old Sri Lankan poet and teacher, has been detained by the Sri Lankan authorities since 16 May 2020 under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), without charges or any credible evidence being presented to a court. Denied fair trial, due process, and unrestricted access to legal counsel, Ahnaf has been detained in squalid conditions and there are allegations that the authorities have attempted to coerce him to make false confessions while under interrogation. Ahnaf Jazeem must be immediately released, or promptly charged with internationally recognizable crime using fair trial standards.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Acting Inspector General of Police
Mr. Chandana Depal Wickramaratne
Police Headquarters,
Church Street,
Colombo 00100,
Sri Lanka
Fax: +94 112 440440
Email: igp@police.lk

Dear Mr Wickramaratne,

*I am deeply worried about the situation of Sri Lankan poet and teacher **Ahnaf Jazeem**, who has been detained without charge since 16 May 2020 by the authorities. It is distressing to know that a year has passed, and no credible, admissible evidence of wrongdoing has ever been presented before a court. The draconian Prevention Terrorist Act (PTA) under which Ahnaf is arrested, allows authorities to arbitrarily detain individuals without any charges for up to 18 months without charge or trial.*

I find it alarming that he has been denied due process and fair trial rights, including unrestricted access to his lawyers and his family. Ahnaf's legal counsel states that he has been coerced to make false confessions while under interrogation and has been made to sign documents written in a language he does not understand. These are all clear violations of rights guaranteed by the Constitution of Sri Lanka and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Sri Lanka is a state party.

Furthermore, I am concerned that he has been detained under squalid conditions that may amount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, which has led to the deterioration of his health. Ahnaf's family is concerned about his health and safety, a fear heightened by his restricted access to lawyers and family members and not knowing when this ordeal might come to an end.

I, therefore, urge you to immediately release Ahnaf Jazeem or, if there is sufficient evidence of criminal wrongdoing, promptly charge him with a recognisable offence, in accordance with international standards. Pending release or charge, I call on you to ensure that his fair trial rights are guaranteed. I also call on the Sri Lankan government to repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which does not meet international human rights standards, and immediately end its use.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ahnaf Jazeem, a Sri Lankan poet and teacher, was arrested by the Terrorism Investigation Department (TID) on 16 May 2020, under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). He was arrested in connection to a Tamil-language collection of poems he published under the title *Navarasam*, as well as other unsubstantiated claims of exposing his students to 'extremist' content and ideology.

Ahnaf did not have any legal representation close to eight months since his arrest. After securing a legal counsel, he was permitted access to his lawyer only on 8 March 2021—after two months of continuous appeals by his lawyer. Even then, his meeting with his lawyer was monitored with officers of the TID listening in and recording their privileged conversations. According to his lawyer, while in detention, Ahnaf was also made to sign documents written in a language he doesn't understand. Authorities have attempted to get him to make self-incriminating, forced confessional statements. Denied access to his family for close to five months since his arrest, he continues to be denied unrestricted and regular access to family. According to his lawyer, Ahnaf has been subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment while in detention and had been kept in unsanitary conditions. On 16 March 2021, his lawyer also [wrote to the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka \(HRSCL\)](#) about the violation of Ahnaf's fundamental rights, due process, and inhuman and degrading treatment.

The arrest of Ahnaf comes amidst the background of increased marginalization, discrimination and targeting of Sri Lanka's Muslim community. Amnesty International [has recorded](#) recent incidents of cabinet proposals, decisions, and government regulations that from the outset discriminate against the country's Muslim minority community which make up approximately 9% of Sri Lanka's population.

In 2017, then UN Special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, Ben Emmerson, highlighted the history of Sri Lankan authorities of prosecuting minorities on charges of terrorism, noting that "the Prevention of Terrorism Act had been used to commit some of the worst human rights violations, including widespread torture and arbitrary detention, in the run-up to and during the conflict, particularly to target minorities and suppress dissent". The report also highlighted the history of Sri Lankan authorities persecuting individuals under terrorism related law with "various real or perceived links or associations with armed groups, and detaining for years without charge or trial, without any judicial review of their detention, and with almost no possibility of release".

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL), in its 2016 submission to the UN Committee against Torture, highlighted the use of torture within Sri Lankan context with "torture being routinely used in all parts of the country regardless of the nature of the suspected offence for which the person is arrested." A more recent prison study done by the HRCSL, published in December 2020, found that PTA detainees faced a continuum of violence. The study found that "violence in police custody was found to be an inherent element of the investigation process, whereby torture is inflicted to extract information, confessions and evidence from detainees.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English or Sinhala
You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 14 July 2021
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Ahnaf Jazeem (He/Him/His)