

URGENT ACTION

STUDENT LEADERS ARBITRARILY DETAINED

Sri Lankan student leaders Galwewa Siridhamma Thero and Wasantha Mudalige, have been detained by the Sri Lankan authorities since 18 August 2022. On 21 August, authorities issued a Detention Order under the draconian anti-terror law, the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) to detain them for 90 days, amidst an ongoing crackdown on protesters by the authorities. Their families are concerned about their safety and worsening health as they continue to be detained without charge or trial under suspicion of acts of “terror” for over 75 days. All anti-terror charges must be dropped against Galwewa Siridhamma Thero and Wasantha Mudalige and stop the detention order from being extended.

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

Director of Terrorism Investigation Division

Mr. A.R.P.J. Alwis

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Sri Lanka

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Dear Mr Wickramaratne

*I am deeply concerned about the situation of **student leaders Galwewa Siridhamma Thero and Wasantha Mudalige**, who have been detained since 18 August 2022 and had their detention extended for 90 days on 21 August 2022 under the draconian anti-terror law Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA).*

I find it alarming that they have been held under squalid conditions and denied due process and fair trial rights. Their families fear for their safety and health while in detention. Siridhamma Thero has contracted dengue fever while in custody and was later hospitalised with high fever. Detaining protesters using terror charges is a clear violation of the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly guaranteed by the Constitution of Sri Lanka and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Sri Lanka is a state party.

Using a draconian law—which the government itself has committed to reform—to crackdown on protesters is against Sri Lanka’s international human rights obligations, especially relating to the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. This points to the environment of systematic crackdown and stifling of dissenting voices against the background of the current economic hardship in the country.

As people in Sri Lanka face the brunt of the ongoing economic crisis, they have the right to express their opinions and call for accountability including through peaceful protests.

I, therefore, urge you to immediately drop all terror related charges against Galwewa Siridhamma Thero and Wasantha Mudalige. In the meantime, I urge you to ensure their access to prompt and regular medical care as necessary.

I also call on the Sri Lankan authorities to repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which does not meet international human rights standards, and to uphold the commitment to end its use. The authorities should immediately review the detention of others held under the PTA, ensuring adequate access to fair bail hearings, and immediate release for all those not facing internationally recognisable charges.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Wasantha Mudalige, the convener of the Inter-University Student Federation (IUSF), and Galawewa Siridhamma Thero, the convener of the Inter-University Bhikku Federation (IUBF), were arrested along with other 18 protesters after dispersing a protest in Colombo on 18 August 2022. While others who were arrested following the protests have been released since, Wasantha Mudalige and Galawewa Siridhamma have been detained further. On 21 August, President Ranil Wickremesinghe in his capacity as Defense Minister approved the detention order of 90 days under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). They were transferred to Tangalle Detention Center in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka. On 26 October, The Tangalle Magistrate Court ordered the Director of Terrorist Investigation Division (TID) to appear before the court for not reporting facts about the two student leaders.

Their family members and lawyer have raised concerns about the safety and deteriorating health while in detention. After multiple public requests from their family members, Galawewa Siridhamma Thero was admitted to Colombo National Hospital on 25 October after suffering from severe rash. He was diagnosed with Dengue fever.

The Sri Lankan authorities have fiercely clamped down on protests and demonized protesters during a period of economic crisis in the country. The government responded to largely peaceful protests with [excessive and unnecessary force](#) and [emergency laws](#) which gave sweeping powers to the police and the armed forces, in an effort to curb further demonstrations. Since President Ranil Wickremesinghe came into power on 21 July, over 200 protesters and protest organizers have been arrested, many under draconian anti-terror laws, with authorities routinely flouting due process, creating a chilling effect on the protest movement. President Ranil Wickremesinghe has also publicly labelled protesters as “terrorists” and “fascists”, in a bid to demonize protesters.

The PTA violates international human rights law and Amnesty International has repeatedly called for its repeal. The PTA, which allows for detention of suspects for up to a year without charge, has been weaponized to stifle dissenting voices, in contravention of Sri Lanka’s international human rights obligations, especially the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Despite the Sri Lankan government’s multiple assurances that the PTA would be reformed in line with international human rights standards, to date no adequate reforms have taken place and the PTA continues to be used as a tool to arbitrarily arrest and detain people, violate fair trial rights, and put detainees at risk of torture and other ill-treatment, amongst other violations.

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL), in its 2016 submission to the UN Committee against Torture, highlighted the use of torture in Sri Lanka 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.” [Another study](#) conducted by the Commission, published in December 2020, found that PTA detainees faced a continuum of violence. The study documented 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.” The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has called on the Sri Lankan government to establish a moratorium on the use of the PTA for new arrests until it is replaced by legislation that adheres to international best practices.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English or Sinhala

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 3 January 2023

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Galwewa Siridhamma Thero (He/Him/His) and Wasantha Mudalige (He/Him/His)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: N/A