



## CPA ALARMED BY INCREASED THREATS AND ATTACKS AGAINST MEDIA

23<sup>rd</sup> January 2008, Colombo, Sri Lanka: The Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) vehemently condemns the violent attack against the Editor of *Rivira*, Mr. Upali Tennakoon this morning. Mr. Tennakoon was on his way to work when attackers who came on motorbikes stabbed and beat him. His wife who had stepped in to intervene also suffered injuries. Both are currently in hospital recovering from injuries sustained in the attack. *Rivira* is a Sinhala newspaper widely read in print and online.

This is the third significant incidence of violence against the media this month. The arson attack on TV broadcaster MBC / MTV Networks that destroyed its Main Control Room and production studios, the assassination of Lasantha Wickremetunge, Editor in Chief of the *Sunday Leader* and the brutal attack against Mr. Tennakoon today confirms our worst fears of an orchestrated terror campaign to silence journalists, conducted with complete impunity.

These attacks are part of a growing trend of media suppression in the country. CPA is alarmed by numerous threats against media personnel and organisations in the recent weeks. One notable incident was the statement made by Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapakse on 14<sup>th</sup> January on national TV when he called a media personality a 'terrorist' and threatened to put him in prison. Subsequently, the person threatened had to flee the country. Many other journalists and media personnel have had to flee the country in the past few weeks due to direct threats and attacks.

According to reports, a special Police team has been appointed to probe attacks on media by the IGP on the instructions of the President, following the assault on Mr. Tennakoon. Given the total failure of similar methods and mechanisms of investigation in the past, CPA is deeply sceptical about the possibility of any constructive outcome from this. We note in this regard the failure of the Cabinet Sub-Committee setup in June 2008 established under the President's instructions to look into the grievances of journalists and come up with any concrete measures to protect them.

We hope the Government appreciates the fact that announcements of investigations which eventually, and inevitably, produce no results in terms of the apprehension, prosecution and conviction of perpetrators of these politically motivated crimes have the broader consequence of seriously eroding public trust and confidence in the criminal investigation process and the administration of justice. The lack of independent and effective investigations into such attacks raises questions whether the Government genuinely wants to unearth the truth behind such attacks and by inaction further exacerbates the culture of impunity.

This belittlement of institutions is as gravely harmful to democracy, the rule of law and the freedom of expression as the escalation of the scale and frequency of physical violence against the media we have witnessed in the last three weeks. This deterioration of democracy, media freedom and freedom of expression in Sri Lanka severely undermines the Government's smug complacency that it is winning the war against terrorism. We reiterate our observation made at the time of Lasantha Wickremetunge's assassination that those responsible for this egregious violence are enemies of democracy and become terrorists themselves.