



CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES
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CPA Statement on *Lanka News Web* story entitled, “State intelligence units list journalists supportive of opposition and NGOs Saravanamuttu and Weliamuna top in the list! [sic].”

4th March 2010, Colombo, Sri Lanka: The Executive Director of CPA Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu and the Executive Director of Transparency International, Sri Lanka (TISL), J.C. Weliamuna have jointly written to His Excellency President Mahinda Rajapaksa expressing their grave concern over the contents of the above *Lanka News Web* report of 3rd March 2010 at http://www.lankanewsweb.com/news/EN_2010_03_02_012.html.

According to the report, state intelligence services have placed CPA Executive Director, Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu “at the top of” this purported list together with Mr. J.C. Weliamuna, Attorney-at-Law and Executive Director of Transparency International, Sri Lanka (TISL). Other members of CPA staff engaged in its programmes on human rights, public interest litigation and citizen journalism initiatives have been mentioned in the report as well. The report further states that persons selected for inclusion in this alleged list, the purpose of which is not clear, have been categorised “according [to] the work they do and a brief description of each individual” on the basis of an unspecified system of points.

CPA cannot independently ascertain the veracity of this report. However, in view of the fact that many of the persons identified in the report have previously been targeted by way of physical violence, death threats and misinformation campaigns, it is impossible not to register our utmost concern, in the broader context of the crisis that Sri Lanka presently faces in respect of democratic freedoms, law and order, and the rule of law.

If the *Lanka News Web* report is true to the effect that state intelligence agencies have been compiling a list or lists of individuals on the basis of perceived or alleged political allegiances, it is cause for serious concern in a number of ways. Firstly, in the context of the dangers faced by critics of the government including journalists, civil society activists and human rights defenders, there are

reasonable grounds for fear about the physical liberty and safety of the individuals concerned. There has been no justice or punishment served by recourse to the criminal justice system in the numerous cases of killings, enforced disappearances and abductions and the entrenched culture of impunity, arbitrariness and the ineffectiveness of law enforcement have only encouraged further abuses.

Secondly, while the legal basis for collecting information on individuals without their consent is unclear, it is an invasion of the privacy of the concerned individuals protected by human rights standards established by international law, and specific conventions such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) binding on the Sri Lankan state, including its intelligence and security apparatus.

Thirdly, the rationale for the compilation of this list, as the title of the report suggests, is that the selected individuals are perceived by the state intelligence agencies to be “supportive of the opposition”, that is an illegitimate and unconstitutional purpose. There is a fundamental misconception that opposition to specific actions and policies by the Government is equal to support for the opposition. It is not only a fundamental democratic principle but also part of the fundamental rights declared and protected by the Constitution that Sri Lankans are entitled to the freedoms of thought, conscience, opinion, expression, association and occupation. Furthermore the conflation of the interests of the government (i.e., the political party for the time being in power) with that of the state (i.e., the people of Sri Lanka) has proved highly problematic. In the absence of illegal or criminal behaviour, the political opinions of individuals are not a national security concern, and therefore entirely outside the remit of state intelligence agencies.

Finally, we would vigorously reiterate that the CPA was formed on, and continues to function, within the framework of a consistent set of liberal democratic values which we believe to be the bedrock of a democratic, open and decent society, and to which we have been never less than wholly committed. The concept of the political, in our view, involves both inclusive engagement and critical debate in civil society, which includes non-governmental organisations as well as political parties within and without government. As our record of work since 1996 demonstrates, we will work in partnership with any person or institution on the basis of shared values. We firmly believe that it is only authoritarian governments that have reason to fear and resent, and therefore seek to control and repress civil society: a political maxim that President Rajapakse should relate to, given his contribution to the fight against authoritarianism and oppression in the 1980s as an opposition politician, human rights lawyer, and civil society activist.

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The Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) was formed in the firm belief that there is an urgent need to strengthen institution- and capacity-building for good governance and conflict transformation in Sri Lanka and that non-partisan civil

society groups have an important and constructive contribution to make to this process. The primary role envisaged for the Centre in the field of public policy is a pro-active and interventionary one, aimed at the dissemination and advocacy of policy alternatives for non-violent conflict resolution and democratic governance. Accordingly, the work of the Centre involves a major research component through which the policy alternatives advocated are identified and developed.

For more information, please visit <http://www.cpalanka.org>