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Sri Lanka: Journalist and human rights defender Ramachandran Sanath summoned for interrogation by the Terrorist Investigation Department

On 1 April 2023, journalist and human rights defender **Ramachandran Sanath** was summoned to appear before the Terrorism Investigation Department (TID) office in Nuwareliya (Central Province) for an inquiry on 6 April 2023. The summons was delivered to Ramachandran Sanath's home in Kandy. The TID refused to disclose the purpose of the inquiry. Front Line Defenders is concerned about the harassment of Ramachandran Sanath, and believe this treatment is linked to his human rights and journalism work.

[Ramachandran Sanath](#) is an independent Tamil journalist, human rights defender, and advocate for the rights of plantation workers in Kandy, Sri Lanka. He held the position of executive treasurer and currently serves as an executive member of the Sri Lanka Working Journalist Association. He has previously worked for the Tamil-language daily print newspaper "Sudaroli", and the news website "Malayaga Kuruvi". Ramachandran Sanath presently works as a parliament correspondent for Uthayan, and serves as an international correspondent for Ethiroli, an Australian Tamil news website. He is known for his outspoken criticism of government policies. Apart from his work as a journalist, Ramachandran Sanath actively writes about social issues and the human rights issues pertaining to Indian-origin Tamils in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, he has been actively involved in protesting and advocating for land rights and fair wages for plantation workers.

The summoning of Ramachandran Sanath by the TID has raised serious concerns regarding his safety and security, as the Sri Lankan anti-terror law and its associated mechanisms have historically been employed against Tamils and Muslims. There are frequent reports of harassment directed towards human rights defenders, peaceful protesters, and journalists, indicative of reprisals for their efforts to promote human rights and expose abuses.

The Indian-origin Tamils, also known as Malayaga Tamils, were brought to Sri Lanka in the 1800s by the British to work on plantations. They have faced continuous human rights violations, notably the stripping of citizenship rights in 1948, and the denial of land ownership after the Regional Plantation Companies took over in 1992. Issues of low pay, increased workloads, and demands for land rights have sparked protests and strikes. These struggles have been consistently and vehemently opposed, and the wage increase proposals and solutions are often unfair and fragmented. Moreover, those advocating for fair wages and land rights for the Malayaga Tamils have frequently been subjected to persecution by both the state and plantation companies.

Ramachandran Sanath has been targeted, harassed, and been subject to surveillance due to his journalism in advocacy for fair wages and land rights of Malayaga plantation workers in Sri Lanka. After participating in a wage rights protest in February 2021, he was subjected to harassment and surveillance. In March and May 2021, unidentified individuals claiming to be intelligence officers visited his family's homes inquiring about his whereabouts and activities. The human rights defender wrote to the Inspector General of Police on 25 May 2021, in response to the intimidation, but no action has been taken thus far.

Front Line Defenders is deeply troubled by the acts of reprisals against Ramachandran Sanath, as well as other human rights activists and journalists, particularly those from Tamil and Muslim communities. It is imperative that all individuals, especially journalists and human rights defenders, are

able to engage in peaceful protests and legitimate dissent without fear of reprisals from the Sri Lankan government or other structures.

Front Line Defenders urges the relevant authorities in Sri Lanka to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally cease all attempts to intimidate human rights defender and journalist Ramachandran Sanath and withdraw reprisals against him;
2. Immediately and unconditionally cease all further forms of questioning or harassment against Ramachandran Sanath, as it is believed that these measures are not only solely related to his legitimate human rights activities but, also violate his rights directly;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders and journalists in Sri Lanka are able to carry out their work in promoting human rights and reporting without fear of reprisals or undue restrictions, in accordance with Sri Lanka's international human rights obligations and commitments.