
“Intelligence lists” of NGO activists, non-existent

Tuesday, 16 March 2010

Last Updated Tuesday, 16 March 2010

In response to well coordinated series of statements and web comments on alleged government plans to “arrest NGO activists and to suppress and intimidate its opponents and critics”, the Office of the President states that it has not found evidence of any “intelligence lists” of NGO activists prepared by the State Intelligence Service as stated on Lanka News Web, or by any other law enforcement authority. The Office of the President further states that any investigation by the authorities on alleged or suspected illegal or criminal activities are, and will be, conducted strictly in accordance with the law.

“There is absolutely no reason to fear that there is a physical threat or lack of safety to the critics of the government including journalists, civil society activists and human rights defenders”, the statement from the Office of the President said. The government remains totally committed to the principles of democracy and the protection of Fundamental Rights guaranteed by the Constitution, the statement added. The government is in the process of preparing comprehensive legislation to govern the NGO/INGO activities in the country, as there are many instances of malpractice, including misappropriation of huge sums donated by foreign governments and organisations. Once such legislation is in place, the government hopes that the NGO/INGO activities could be properly observed and monitored to suit the national requirements, the statement added. Following is the full text of the statement:

Statements on alleged “intelligence lists” of NGO activists In the past few days there has been a well coordinated series of statements and web comments on alleged government plans to arrest NGO activists and to suppress and intimidate its opponents and critics. On March 03, 2010, a website named Lanka News Web carried a report titled “State intelligence units list journalists supportive of opposition and NGOs Saravanamuttu and Weliamuna top in the list!”. This report had falsely stated that State intelligence services had placed the Executive Director of the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu and Mr. J. C. Weliamuna, Executive Director of Transparency International (TI) at the top of a list that included other members of CPA staff engaged in its programmes on human rights, public interest litigation and citizen journalism initiatives, and that those in this list had been categorized on the basis of an unspecified system of points, according to the work they do and a brief description of each individual.

On the following day, Dr Saravanamuttu and Mr. Weliamuna wrote a letter to H E the President Mahinda Rajapaksa expressing grave concern over the contents of the above Lanka News Web report. On the same day, the CPA issued a statement on this report to the local and international media. Other organizations such as Freedom House, Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International (AI) did not lag behind in coming out with statements expressing concern and criticizing the government based on this web report and the CPA statement, without any verification of the accuracy of the original report. Having made its own inquiries into these allegations, the Office of the President has not found evidence of any such list of persons prepared by the State Intelligence Service as stated on Lanka News Web, or by any other law enforcement authority. Further, this Office has found there is no point system in intelligence gathering in Sri Lanka as referred to in the news website. Any investigation by the authorities on alleged or suspected illegal or criminal activities are, and will be, conducted strictly in accordance with the law. In view of the statements made with regard to this web report, it is necessary to state that the law enforcement authorities have every right to investigate any suspected illegal or criminal activity and there is absolutely no need for such inquiries to be conducted with the consent of those being inquired into, as stated by the CPA, or to reveal the nature or scope of the investigations to the person or persons being probed. Such revelations will surely negate the purpose of the investigation. However, there is absolutely no reason to fear that there is a physical threat or lack of safety to the critics of the government including journalists, civil society activists and human rights defenders, as suggested by the news website, CPA, HRW, AI and others, who are repeating a frequent litany of criticism of the Government based on a wholly false web report. The Lanka News Web, in which the said item first appeared, is well known for the publication of totally fabricated, malicious and slanderous material to discredit the government and its leaders. It is surprising as to why any persons interested in the truth and with analytical capabilities, would give credence to an item published in such a website, which has not hidden its vested interests. Further, not a single other publication of credibility and repute in Sri Lanka have carried this item or followed it up on their own. The government remains totally committed to the principles of democracy and the protection of Fundamental Rights guaranteed by the Constitution, and all inquiries conducted by the law enforcement authorities are done fully in keeping with the law, and not in breach of accepted standards of Human Rights, with all citizens having full recourse to the Courts and due process. If the CPA, as stated by its Executive Director, functions within the framework of a consistent set of liberal democratic values which it believes to be the bedrock of a democratic, open and decent society, there could be no reason to fear any investigation into its affairs, in the event the law enforcement authorities deem it fit to carry out any probe on CPA. This would apply to TI, too. It seems hardly a coincidence that the said news report of Lanka News Web of March 03, 2010 and the statements of CPA (March 04, 2010), HRW (March 05, 2010 and the related statements by AI, Freedom House and others, as well as recent comments and statements made on Sri Lanka by spokespersons of foreign governments and international bodies, appear to be well synchronized to impact on the current general election campaign and on the issue of continuity of GSP+ concessions. Sri Lankan society is now emerging from a prolonged armed conflict with the forces of terror, where those who threatened the sovereignty of Sri Lanka and its territorial integrity were largely financed from abroad. The apologists of these forces of separatism and terror are still active both in Sri Lanka and especially abroad. As such, it would be necessary for the law enforcement authorities to have an overview of the activities of organizations and individuals that receive substantial funds from abroad with little or no accountability to Sri Lankan society. Such oversight does not translate into any list of journalists

supportive of the opposition, civil society activists and NGOs or INGOs. The variety and range of reportage and comment in the media in the current election campaign points to the wide freedom of expression enjoyed by the media and journalists in Sri Lanka today. The government is in the process of preparing comprehensive legislation to govern the NGO/INGO activities in the country, as there are many instances of malpractice, including misappropriation of huge sums donated by foreign governments and organisations. Once such legislation is in place, the government hopes that the NGO/INGO activities could be properly observed and monitored to suit national requirements. Presidential Secretariat Colombo