



CANADIAN TAMIL CONGRESS ■ CONGRÈS TAMOUL CANADIEN

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SRI LANKA: A KILLING FIELD FOR JOURNALISTS

The New Year came in with a bang for journalists in Sri Lanka. Another eminent defender of democracy was murdered ruthlessly by armed men in broad day light in the capital Colombo. The blame for the death of Lasantha Wickramatunga is being placed squarely on the hands of the current Sri Lankan government led by President Mahinda Rajapaksa. Wickramatunga is the chief editor of the popular Sri Lankan weekly "Sunday Leader", and a contributor to Time magazine was an ardent and consistent voice of reason in Sri Lanka. Wickramatunga's death comes a day after a television studio was vandalized by government sponsored thugs.

The murder of Wickramatunga has shocked international civil society agencies. The New York based Human Rights Watch condemned the killing. "Sri Lanka prides itself as a functioning democracy. Yet media freedom, a vital pillar of democracy, has increasingly come under attack," said Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "The government should not take its recent military victories as a signal that it can stifle dissent" he concluded.

Amnesty International in its press release stated, "ensuring respect for human rights around the world very often relies on impartial and rigorous media coverage. Without exposure and public scrutiny, abuses can flourish under a veil of secrecy and denial. The climate of impunity for attacks on the media has made it impossible to get an accurate impartial picture of what is happening." Sadly the 25 year old civil war has taken place with a lack of international media coverage.

"There is a field of buried journalists whose silenced voices speak volumes on the rights and freedoms of all Sri Lankans; particularly journalists who dare to speak out against the Sri Lankan government," stated David Poopalapillai, National Spokesperson for the Canadian Tamil Congress. "Tamil Canadians are sickened by the callous and cowardly attack on this iconic journalist. We urge the Government of Canada to condemn this senseless murder and to exert pressure on the Sri Lankan government to pave the way for independent inquiry, coordinated by the International community."

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