

# *National Peace Council of Sri Lanka*

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## **Media Release 1**

### **The Assassination of Lasantha Wickrematunge**

Barely three days after the MTV television station was bombed and razed by an armed group, armed assassins have claimed the life of one of Sri Lanka's foremost journalists, Lasantha Wickrematunge. The killing of this courageous journalist will add to the sense of intimidation and fear in the media, which has already suffered several such attacks and killings of media persons.

As editor of the Sunday Leader, Lasantha Wickrematunge was fearless in exposing political weaknesses and corruption in the government and in society in general, and the impunity that accompanies them. He also advocated a negotiated political solution to the ethnic conflict and highlighted the cost of the war which the government is undertaking. Although an individual, he was also the creator and leader of a media institution and his assassination can be construed as a death blow to media freedom to take up the issues he did.

Lasantha Wickrematunge will long be remembered by those who believe in the role of the media to create a politically literate society which alone can protect democracy. The National Peace Council condemns his assassination and mourns his loss. We grieve with his family, colleagues and friends and

trust that his sacrifice would mark an end to a culture of impunity that seems to be overtaking us.

Thinking people can only reflect on Pastor Niemoller's saying, Who is next? At this time, in our helplessness, we can only appeal to the government and our political leaders to follow democratic and righteous norms and ensure that the freedom of expression, freedom of media, and the Right to Life of all is protected.

## **Media Release 2**

### **LTTE Ban and the Issue of Trapped Civilians**

Nearly seven years after a previous government lifted a ban on the LTTE to facilitate political engagement and a peace process, the present government, has again proscribed the LTTE. The government has justified its decision on the grounds that the LTTE is preventing civilians trapped in territory under its control. The ban comes in the aftermath of major military battles in which the government has regained strategic and symbolically important territory once held by the LTTE.

The plight of trapped civilians in the territory under LTTE control is increasing. With the Sri Lankan military closing in on the LTTE, there have been increasing reports of civilian fatalities. However, the government's decision to ban the LTTE is unlikely to induce the LTTE to seek the establishment of a humanitarian corridor that would enable the civilian population to move to places of greater safety. We do not believe that isolating the LTTE is helpful. The National Peace Council believes that the government would better serve the trapped civilians by politically engaging the LTTE rather than cutting them off entirely with a ban.

We note that on several occasions, religious leaders within the country have offered to intervene to negotiate a humanitarian corridor for the trapped civilians. NPC calls on the government to explore this option to safeguard the lives of civilians. We also call on the government to seek international

assistance in negotiating a humanitarian corridor for the civilians who wish to leave the war zones. We also request that NGOs and civil society groups be permitted to support civilians trapped in shrinking areas still under LTTE control.

## Governing Council

The National Peace Council is an independent and non partisan organisation that works towards a negotiated political solution to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. It has a vision of a peaceful and prosperous Sri Lanka in which the freedom, human rights and democratic rights of all the communities are respected. The policy of the National Peace Council is determined by its Governing Council of 20 members who are drawn from diverse walks of life and belong to all the main ethnic and religious communities in the country.