



Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

New Delhi, India. London, UK. Accra, Ghana
NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic & Social Council of the United Nations

18 March 2014

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Maja Daruwala

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Prime Minister David Cameron
Prime Minister's Office
10 Downing St,
London SW1A 2AA,
United Kingdom

Re: Arrest and detention of Ruki Fernando and Father Praveen Mahesan

Dear Prime Minister Cameron,

When you visited Sri Lanka in November you promised to shine a light on what was happening in that country. Only months after, one of the people who came to meet you, a priest, and one of Sri Lanka's most prominent and outspoken activists are in custody.

Human rights activists Rukshan Fernando (known as Ruki Fernando) and Father Praveen Mahesan, were arrested in Kilinochchi, on 16 March by the Terrorism Investigation Division (TID) of Sri Lankan police.

According to reports, the two human rights defenders were being charged under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), which allows them to be held for up to 18 months without trial. They are accused of trying to cause communal disharmony and disturbance. The anti-terrorism act has been widely criticised for being used for arbitrary detentions, contravening the right to a fair trial and due process, and has even led to torture and disappearances. Using the PTA to limit the legitimate work of human rights defenders is a serious violation of international human rights instruments.

Last week, an activist, Balendran Jeyakumari, and her 13-year-old daughter, who were campaigning for the release of relatives missing from the war, were arrested for allegedly harbouring a former rebel who shot at police. Mr. Fernando and Father Praveen were arrested when they visited Kilinochchi to investigate Jeyakumari's case.

We urge you to act in support of these people who are long time human rights defenders so that their release is secured at the earliest.

Yours sincerely,

Maja Daruwala
Director
Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative