

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/sri-lanka-detention-of-ifj-directors-04-11-2013,45414.html>

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Asia - Sri Lanka

Media rights activists detained

## Detention of IFJ Directors reflects dreadful state of media freedom in Sri Lanka

4 November 2013

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Reporters Without Borders and its partner organization, Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka (JDS) unequivocally condemn the detention and harassment of International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) Asia-Pacific Director **Jacqueline Park** and Asia-Pacific Deputy Director **Jane Worthington** in Colombo last week.

Park and Worthington of the IFJ were detained at a locally organized press freedom meeting in Colombo and held in their hotel from 30 October 2013. They were subjected to harassment by means of lengthy interrogations by defence and immigration officials, as well as by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), for three days.

Although they were accused of violating visa regulations, the authorities have allowed them to fly out of the country without any charges.

According to the IFJ, they were taken from the meeting to their hotel against their will, their passports were confiscated and they were not allowed to leave to board their planned flight on 31 October. The police have inserted a device into Park's laptop and appears to have downloaded files. Mass media and information minister Keheliya Rambukwella went one step further and publicly accused them of engaging in "anti-government activism" in breach of their visa conditions.

A careful look at the detailed descriptions provided on the website of the Department of Immigration would reveal that there is no special visa category for journalists. It is however stated that if anyone travels to Sri Lanka as a reporter, they should obtain press accreditation, which has nothing to do with any particular visa category.

"The high-handed action by the defence and immigration authorities yet again reflects the dreadful state of media freedom in Sri Lanka, which has already been recognized as a one of the worst countries for journalists. The situation for journalists and media workers is still shockingly precarious, four years after the Sri Lankan government formally declared an end to the civil war," the two information rights organizations said in a joint statement.

The latest incident involving two international media personnel has come at a time when Colombo, which is under international pressure to improve the worsening human rights situation in the country, is set to host the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting on 15 November 2013.

"The harassment of two top international media rights workers simply shows that Colombo considers itself above the law and takes no note of international pressure or condemnation. The safety and security of local journalists and activists involved in this incident are at great risk. The government must do everything in its power to ensure their safety," Reporters Without Borders and JDS said in the joint statement.

At least 39 media workers have been killed or abducted and made to disappear while many media institutions have been bombed and burned, forcing many in the profession to flee the country. Not a single perpetrator has been brought to justice. Sri Lanka is classified by Reporters Without Borders as a country "under surveillance" because of its violations of freedom of expression and is ranked 162nd out of 179 countries in its 2013 [press freedom index](#).

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