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PRESS RELEASE

India: Ministers Move to Decriminalise Defamation

London, 21.02.2011: ARTICLE 19 welcomes the Indian government's initiative to reform its penal code and decriminalise defamation, used to harass and censor journalists and political figures.

"We welcome the Indian government's initiative to decriminalise defamation, following the example of other countries such as the UK and Sri Lanka. Criminal defamation is one of worst forms of state suppression of free speech," says Dr Agnes Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director. *"ARTICLE 19 is ready to support the government in creating a new defamation code in line with international standards."*

Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Ambika Soni, and Minister of Law and Justice, Moodbidri Veerappa Moily, have publicly stated over the past month that the government are actively looking to decriminalise defamation. Both members of the Indian Union Cabinet have agreed that the criminalisation of defamation in India has produced "*malicious prosecution*" of journalists.

India would join a growing number of countries acknowledging that criminalisation of defamation results in a disproportionate restriction on freedom of expression.

Countries worldwide including Armenia, Ghana, Ireland, Mexico, Papua New Guinea, Timor Leste and the UK have all decriminalised over the last few years. In South Asia, fellow SAARC member Sri Lanka decriminalised in 2002, and the Maldives in 2009.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- For more on the worldwide status of defamation, see the ARTICLE 19 Defamation Map at: www.article19.org/advocacy/defamationmap/map
- For more information please contact: Oliver Spencer, oliver@article19.org +44 20 7324 2500
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.