

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/sri-lanka-soldiers-attack-journalists-05-08-2013,45019.html>

Asia - Sri Lanka

Military violence

Soldiers attack journalists covering environmental protests

5 August 2013

Reporters Without Borders condemns the army's use of violence on 1 August against journalists covering demonstrations by residents of the western town of Weliveriya to call for the closure of a factory accused of polluting local water supplies.

After six days of growing protests, army personnel used force to disperse the demonstrators.

"We are very disturbed by the repeated use of violence against journalists in Sri Lanka," Reporters Without Borders said. "At best, the police take no action when journalists report that they have been the targets of violence. At worst, the army itself, equipped with lethal weapons, organizes and executes these attacks, as it did in Weliveriya."

Reporters Without Borders added: "These unacceptable incidents show that, although the civil war is now over in Sri Lanka, violence by the armed forces is still far from being brought to an end and that freedom of information is still in great danger."

Many journalists who had gone to Weliveriya to cover the protests and their dispersal were threatened and roughed up by soldiers and were prevented from covering what was taking place in the town. Cameras were also damaged.

The Free Media Movement, a Sri Lankan group that defends freedom of information, reported in a release on 2 August that the army carried out a coordinated operation to break up the protests and that, in the course of these operations, soldiers harassed, threatened and attacked reporters.

Soldiers assaulted a photographer with the Sinhalese and Tamil-language newspaper *Ada* after forcing him get down from the rooftop in the Weliveriya district of Orutota from which he had taking photos. Soldiers forcibly evicted other reporters from their various vantage points and shut them in a building to prevent them covering the protests.

The Weliveriya incidents came less than a month after **Kunala Dileep**, a journalist with the Tamil-language daily *Uthayan*, was attacked in the northern city of Jaffna as he was leaving the newspaper to go home by motorcycle on 10 July.

Several individuals in a tricar deliberately drove into his motorcycle and then fled. Dileep was hospitalized with arm and leg injuries, which fortunately were not life threatening.

Ranked 162nd out of 179 countries in the [2013 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#), Sri Lanka is ruled by the Rajapaksa family, who are on the 2013 Reporters Without Borders list of "[Predators of Press Freedom](#)."

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