

Police media spokesperson speaks against media freedom

10/8/2008

8th August 2008, Colombo, Sri Lanka: We are appalled by the statement of SSP Ranjith Gunesekara made at a press conference on 7th August 2008 regarding brutish Government Minister Mervyn Silva's continued violence against media in Sri Lanka.

SSP Gunesekara said that Mervyn Silva had a legitimate right to stop anyone videoing him and that it was illegal to film a politician when journalists weren't welcome to do so. Further he stated that Sirasa TV should not have sent a crew to cover the flyover knowing full well the the Minister's hostility towards them.

These are incredible statements. SSP Gunesekara's meek submissiveness to Mervyn's outrageous violence is an insult to the Police and the rule of law. We unequivocally condemn these statements as a clear attempt to restrict media freedom in Sri Lanka.

We challenge SSP Ranjith Gunesekara to inform us under which law he proposes to stop journalists from covering public events and those taking part in them, including politicians. Any citizen is free to record public events as they see fit. Any journalist is free to report from, be present at, and record public events and those to which they have been expressly invited to cover, as was the case with the opening of the flyover in Kelaniya when Mervyn Silva violently attacked the Sirasa TV crew.

We strongly urge the Police to take immediate steps to educate SSP Ranjith Gunesekara on the basic rights and freedoms enshrined in our Constitution that guarantee the freedom of expression and the freedom of the media.

We call upon all media and journalists to disregard SSP Ranjith Gunesekara's misplaced statements. We recognize that independent media in Sri Lanka will and should not bow to the violent fiat of goons in the guise of Ministers or accept statements by lackey's parading as Police officers.

- FMM