

# Associated Press correspondent penalised for his war coverage

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Reporters Without Borders today called on the Sri Lankan government to give a more convincing explanation about its refusal to renew the press visa of the *Associated Press* correspondent in the country

**Ravi Nessman.**

Nessman, an American national who has been based in Sri Lanka since 2007, was forced to leave the country on 20 July after his visa was not renewed.

Advisor to the head of state, Lucien Rajakarunanayake, said the refusal was because foreign correspondents were not allowed to stay in the country for more than two years, but one international media correspondent said he had never heard of this "rule". A spokesman at the American news agency called the decision "very disturbing"

Nessman had a by-lined exclusive on a UN internal report drawing attention to the real toll of civilian victims of the conflict in the north and east of the country that ended when the Sri Lankan army defeated the Tamil Tigers in May 2009. The report seriously implicated top UN and government officials.

"News agencies have been some of the few media that managed to cover the bloody conflict in Sri Lanka independently. Now journalists are being unfairly punished for having written these reports," the worldwide press freedom organisation said.

"After attacking human rights activists and doctors, the government is now taking it out on foreign journalists who reported on the suffering of the people. It's extremely unfortunate," the organisation added.

Reporters Without Borders has obtained information that at least eight foreign reporters or contributors to international media have been forced to leave the country because of threats from the authorities or their supporters since 1st January 2009. At least 30 Sri Lankan journalists have fled their country since the start of 2008.