

IFJ condemns heavy-handed military tactics

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The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has expressed its concern after receiving reports from its affiliate, the Free Media Movement (FMM), that a group of female journalists, including an Irish reporter and camera operator, were forced by the military to leave Jaffna and return to Colombo.

The journalists had obtained prior approval from the Ministry of Defence to video areas and interview people in Jaffna between October 4 and October 7, and visit locations in Mannar, Vavuniya and the east. On Thursday October 4, shortly after the reporters checked in to the Yarl Thinakural Rest lodge in Jaffna, a group of military personnel visited the lodge and ordered the reporters to stay at the Palaly military camp for their own safety.

On Friday October 5 the foreign reporters were given an escorted tour of the Jaffna town by the military and on the insistence of some of the journalists, were also taken to the Jaffna Human Rights Commission office and the Jaffna hospital but were only allowed to video outside the premises. They were then escorted to a waiting aeroplane and forced to fly back to Colombo two days before schedule.

IFJ Asia-Pacific Director Jacqueline Park described the situation as an attempt by the military to control the media. "While the journalists were not harmed, they were inevitably limited in who they could speak to and where they could go and that is not free or fair reporting," Park said.

According to the FMM, a source close to one of the journalists said, "The journalists were treated well at the camp but yet they were not happy because they were not allowed to move around freely. If they knew they could not stay for more than a day they would not have gone to Jaffna in the first place".

The IFJ supports the FMM in condemning the actions of the military as detrimental to press freedom and urges the military to allow journalists to report freely