



IFJ Calls For An End To Brutal Targeting Of Media In Sri Lanka

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The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has demanded an end to the continued and brutal targeting of Tamil media workers and the intimidation and censorship of Sri Lankan media.

Sathasivam Baskaram, a distributor for the Tamil newspaper *Uthayan* was reportedly shot dead on August 15 in Jaffna while returning from marking deliveries. According to an IFJ affiliate, the Free Media Movement (FMM), Baskaram was delivering the paper outside of the curfew hours that have been operating in the area since August 11.

"The IFJ is disgusted by the senseless killing of Baskaram, which is indicative of a disturbing trend of relentless targeting of the Tamil media. This latest murder raises further safety concerns for Tamil-language media workers in Sri Lanka, many of whom reportedly fear for their lives, said IFJ President Christopher Warren.

Baskaran is the fourth employee of the *Uthayan* newspaper group to be slain in the recent past.

"Falling security and increased civil violence has led to an increasingly dangerous environment for journalists to work in. The Tamil-language press has particularly borne the brunt of such conflict, being targeted by government, extremists and rival Tamil groups," Warren said.

There is also increasing pressure on independent Sinhala and English language media to take a sectarian stand in their reporting of the conflict.

"The Sri Lankan Government and warring parties must respect the media's independence and the public's right to full, uncensored information. It is most important in times of conflict."

On the same day as Baskaram was murdered, the offices of Tamil newspaper, *Surdaroli*, in Colombo were searched by army personnel.

"This kind of harassment and attempt to censor *Surdaroli* is a grave violation of freedom of the press and is a blatant attempt to intimidate the staff of the newspaper. The continued harassment of the Tamil media in Sri Lanka must stop," said Warren.

According to the FMM and other sources, distributors of Tamil language dailies, *Surdoli* and *Thinakkural*, have been receiving death threats from anti-LTTE para-military groups demanding that distribution stop immediately. This has caused a number of newspaper distributors to curtail their distribution in government-controlled areas according to local reports.

There are also reports of Tamil media organisations facing "unofficial" censorship from the government.

The IFJ, the organisation representing more than 500,000 journalists in over 115 countries, sends its unconditional support to all Sri Lankan media who remain committed to providing balanced, independent news, despite facing immense pressure from external forces.

"We stand in solidarity with our Sri Lankan colleagues during this difficult time. These atrocities against journalists and media organisations must not be permitted to continue and the IFJ demands the Sri Lankan government put an end the violence and intimidation immediately," Warren said.