

Journalist Sathiyamoorthy killed inside Safe Zone



Puniamoorthy Sathiyamoorthy, journalist and political analyst, well-known and highly respected by the Tamils in Sri Lanka and among diaspora Tamils, sustained serious injuries in the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) artillery barrage Thursday on Theavipuram in the 'safety zone' declared by Sri Lanka government in Mullaitheevu district in Vanni, and succumbed to his wounds. Lack of proper medical attention contributed to his death, according to relatives who cared for him after the incident.

IATAJ condemned this assassination of Sathiyamoorthy, a Tamil journalist of long-standing, contributed news reports and analyses, as well as short stories and poems, to various Tamil newspapers and journals.

Sathiyamoorthy was a sympathiser of the cause of a Tamil Eelam – or an independent Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka's north and east. He also was a frequent contributor to media controlled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the principal armed group waging war against the Sri Lankan Government since 1983.

The IATAJ is informed that Sathiyamoorthy was not an armed combatant with either the LTTE or any of the other forces that have fought the Sri Lankan Government over the past quarter century.

The IATAJ calls on Sri Lanka's Government to conform with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1738, which obliges governments to recognise media personnel working in areas of armed conflict as civilians and non-combatants. Under the resolution, the targeting of journalists in situations of armed conflict is a violation of international humanitarian law.

"The death of Puniamoorthy Sathiyamoorthy tragically underscores the extreme dangers for all journalists in Sri Lanka who try to report from the war zones or to offer a critical view of the conduct of the war," IATAJ President Anandhi Suriyaprakasam said.

"The IATAJ calls on Sri Lanka's Government to investigate the circumstances of Sathiyamoorthy's death, and to clarify whether he was killed in a government-declared 'safe zone', as reported in some sections of the media."

Tamil media have reported that Sathiyamoorthy was killed in an Army attack on a "safe zone" declared by the Sri Lankan Government at Theavipuram, in Mullaitheevu district of the Vanni region.

Sathiyamoorthy's death comes as local and foreign media organisations in Sri Lanka have been besieged by a campaign of intimidation led by senior Government officials seeking to shut down all independent sources of information about the ground realities of the war.

Since early January, dozens of Sri Lanka's journalists and media workers have left the country fearing for their lives as the Government's most significant successes in the long-running civil war have coincided with a sharp deterioration in the media freedom environment.