

International mission notes censorship and threats to Sri Lankan media

The International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression Mission, also known as the International Mission, following a fact finding mission the group undertook to Sri Lanka, has expressed concerns over indirect censorship and threats faced by the local media.

Comprising representatives from 12 media groups, including the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) Reporters without Borders (RSF), International Press Institute (IPI) and UNESCO, International Mission said it expressed its concerns at meetings with several authorities including the Government Defense spokesman Minister Keheliya Rambukwelle.

“We raised the killing of 8 journalists. We received a pledge and government assurance that investigations into the killings will be investigated and reports made available.

“We will follow up on the investigations,” the Director of the International Media Support (IMS) Thomas Hughes told the press in Colombo yesterday.

Asked if the organization can accept the government pledges, Mr. Hughes said they would take it on the face value adding that they would take up the issues faced by Sri Lankan journalists at international level to ensure the government sticks by its pledges.

Mr. Red Batario from the International News Safety Institute (INSI) says there has been a serious security deterioration for the Sri Lankan media with threats, abductions and attacks committed by all the parties in the conflict and particularly paramilitary and militia groups.

“Even in cases where evidence exists of the identity of the alleged killers, little or no action has apparently been taken by the relevant authorities.

Those supporting a negotiated settlement are often labeled as traitors and supporters of one or the other combatant parties.

There also appears to be a wide acceptance of hate speeches. As a consequence many media workers are in hiding while in other cases threats have been made to the families of the media workers,” Mr. Batario said.

While reminding the warring parties in Sri Lanka of their responsibilities under the common article 3 of the Geneva convention, the International Mission calls for a complete halt of violence against the media, timely investigations into the killing of journalists and a pledge that the perpetrators are brought to book.