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Tamil parliamentarian narrowly escapes Assassination

The Australasian Federation of Tamil Associations (AFTA), the umbrella body of the peak Tamil associations in Australia and New Zealand, condemns in the strongest term the assassination attempt on Mr. Sivagnanam Sritharan, a Tamil National Alliance (TNA) Parliamentarian from Northern Sri Lanka.

Mr. Sritharan told Australian Tamil Broadcasting Corporation (ATBC) - a 24 hour Radio broadcasting from Sydney - on Tuesday night that he narrowly escaped from a group of attackers who lobbed two hand grenades targeting his vehicle and fired at the vehicle using pistols from behind at Nochchiyaagama in the north central Anuradhapura district on Monday 7 March. When he was attacked, the parliamentarian was on his way from north to Colombo in the south to attend the Tuesday's sittings of the Sri Lankan Parliament. "*The armed men fled the site when my security guard opened fire in self-defence*", the parliamentarian told the ATBC radio from Colombo by telephone. According to the police in Anuradhapura district, no one was hurt in the attack and the shaken parliamentarian was escorted by them to the capital Colombo.

His party colleague in parliament and the General Secretary of TNA, Mr. Senathirasa has told that this attack on the parliamentarian has been carried out as a threat to silence Tamils' democratic voice. If the perpetrators of this dastardly act are not identified and dealt with, it will be construed as the government is accepting responsibility for this crime, he added.

Even after this attempt on his life, Mr. Sritharan declared publicly on Tuesday that his constituents are being photographed and forced to register with the military, despite the fact that there was a court ruling that it is illegal for the military to be involved in such activities.

AFTA feels that the experience Mr. Sritharan has just gone through on Monday could be the beginning of a new series of assassinations of democratically elected Tamil leaders to undermine Tamil voice seeking a just political solution to the long standing ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. It should be noted that after Mr. Rajapakse took over the presidency, three Tamil parliamentarians were killed in cold blood and the perpetrators of these crimes are yet to be brought to justice.

In a written statement to the sixteenth session of the Human Rights Council (28 February – 25 March 2011) the Amnesty International has pointed out that "*Sri Lanka's human rights record has not improved since Amnesty International last addressed this Council in May 2010. Impunity persists for past violations and abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law, and new and serious violations of human rights continue to be reported.*" The full AI statement can be accessed at:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA37/002/2011/en>

AFTA calls on all the Australian and New Zealand parliamentarians and the governments to condemn this terror tactic outright and bring pressure on the Sri Lankan authorities to identify and bring to books the perpetrators of this crime.

AFTA Member Associations:

Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Darwin, Melbourne, Sydney, Auckland and Wellington