



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Arrest of Jaffna Mayor V. Manivannan under Prevention of Terrorism Act Condemned

We condemn the arrest yesterday of the Mayor of Jaffna, V. Manivannan, Esq. by the Terrorism Investigation Department. We are outraged by this arrest, first, because it was done for no act of violence or terrorism, but purportedly for the use of a uniform by some municipal employees and, second, because the arrest is under the PTA which multiple Sri Lankan governments have pledged to revoke because it does not comply with international standards.

Mayor Manivannan is one of the highest ranking local Tamil officials on the island while the provincial councils are non-functional because of election delays. His arrest follows that of two Tamil journalists from Jaffna's TubeTamil, Divinia Nilusini and Juan Wimalraj,¹ under the PTA on March 29, whose whereabouts remain unknown and who have not yet been brought to court.

In her report released in February, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights noted the early warning signs of ethnic and religious exclusion and marginalization and of growing authoritarianism. These arrests under the PTA for non-significant offenses is a sign that those warning signs are rapidly turning into repression and injustice.

Before his arrest "[O]n Thursday evening, Manivannan held a press conference to address the allegations, and explained that the uniforms were in fact the same as those worn by a similar task force ran by the Colombo Municipal Council. The Mayor said that the uniforms held no further connotations and that the police were making allegations based on social media conspiracy theories," according to London's *Tamil Guardian*.

If one of the highest-ranking Tamil officials is subjected to this type of action, ordinary citizens are at risk of much worse. Manivannan's arrest is clear sign of the deteriorating situation in Sri Lanka and an increase in intimidation of human right defenders, journalists and those who are politically active.

The PTA "has been used to arrest and detain people for months, even years," and one former detainee notes that "In my experience, they just use the PTA to keep you locked up with no evidence."² During his 2017 visit to Sri Lanka Ben Emmerson, UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion of human rights while

¹ [tubetamil1_tubetamil2.pdf \(sangam.org\)](#)

² [Abuses under Sri Lanka's Prevention of Terrorism Act | HRW](#)

countering terrorism noted that the PTA was used “disproportionately against members of the Tamil community.” He also said Tamils have “borne the brunt of the state’s well-oiled torture apparatus.”³

We call upon the world governments and the United Nations bodies to lodge their strong protest with the Sri Lankan government and on the Sri Lankan government to drop all charges against the Mayor.

For more information, contact:

M. Manokaran
Chairman - Australian Tamil Congress (**ATC**)
T: +61 300 660 629
Email: Mano_manics@hotmail.com
Website: www.australiantamilcongress.com/en/
Twitter: [@austamilcongres](https://twitter.com/austamilcongres)

V. Ravi Kumar
General Secretary, British Tamils Forum (**BTF**)
T: +44 (0) 7814 486087
Email: info@britishtamilsforum.org
Website: www.britishtamilsforum.org
Twitter: [@tamilsforum](https://twitter.com/tamilsforum)

V. Revichandran
Irish Tamils Forum (**ITF**)
T: 00353 899592707
Email: irishtamilsforum@gmail.com

Pregas Padayachee
Solidarity Group for Peace and Justice in Sri Lanka (**SGPJ**- South Africa)
Email: pregasenp@telkomsa.net

S. Seetharam
President - United States Tamil Action Group (**USTAG**)
(formerly USTPAC)
T: +1(202) 595 3123
Email: info@ustag.org
Website: www.theustag.org
Twitter: [@UstpacAdvocacy](https://twitter.com/UstpacAdvocacy)

³ [Visit to Sri Lanka - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism \(A/HRC/40/52/Add.3\) - Sri Lanka | ReliefWeb](#)