



JAFFNA UNIVERSITY SCIENCE TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION
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His Excellency The President,
Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

Your Excellency,

Grave and dangerous plight of students at the University of Jaffna

We members of the university community in Jaffna feel constrained to write you directly in view of a deteriorating situation, where no official here seems to be able to deal with the problem or to adequately comprehend our concern.

It began with the Army entering the students' hostels on 27th November, ostensibly to prevent the lighting of flames. The occasion had a political association that has polarized society and the community needs space to discuss its significance and to sort out its own differences. Default on the part of the Government through continued presence of the military without tangible moves towards a political settlement, has helped the mobilisation of youthful feelings to turn it into a day of defiance, where its original association becomes less important.

Your Excellency well knows, having been in politics for several decades and in the center of two Southern insurgencies, that the defeat of an insurgent force does not extinguish the feelings or causes that gave rise to it. Such feelings are not a police matter, but are rather to be handled as part of the political task of reconciliation and rebuilding.

We have all tried hard to make our university one that respects differences and advocates pluralism. The Army entering the halls, separating the Sinhalese from the Tamil students and showing hostility to and even threatening the latter not only undermines our efforts but has serious implications for the future.

The demonstration on the following day, 28th, was a protest against the previous day's incident, carrying slogans that were well within the norms of democratic protest. If the

students had been allowed to walk the short distance from the main entrance on Ramanathan Road and reenter by the Science Faculty entrance nothing untoward would have happened. Rather than calm the situation matters were made worse by the Police physically attacking the students.

The same night a petrol bomb exploded at the Sri-TELO camp behind the University causing no physical harm to anyone. Security around the university, including by several agents in mufti, had been very tight and we find it puzzling that the perpetrators got away scot-free. Even more remarkable is that the Kopay Police were able to come up with names of four persons to arrest over the incident, which evidently no one had given them. We are confident that these students had nothing to do with bomb throwing. Two were arrested at their homes before the night was out and two were handed over by the University authorities the following day. They were all detained under the PTA and taken to Vavuniya.

There were several acts of harassment in the University by persons in mufti and the interrogation of an assistant lecturer over the phone over his casual reference to heroes' day in response to a text query by a Sinhalese student. These reveal an attempt to tackle a political question through heavy handed intimidation. Instead of putting an end to the insanity, more followed.

Another list of ten

On the morning of 6th December, the university administration was given, by a man who claimed to be from the TID, a list containing names of ten persons (see annexe) to be produced at the Jaffna Police Station, without any intimation of the reasons or the charges against them. The news shocked the university community and parents were distraught. One sickly mother of a student handed over to the Police by the University was so upset with the University's helplessness that she threatened to take poison.

A study of the list convinced us that all these students were wanted only because they were well known as prominent in student activities or were victims of police assault on 28th November, whose pictures featured in news reports on the internet.

The practice of the University authorities 'handing over' students gives rise to some questions and we are not sure of the legal situation. At the same time we realise that parents sometimes wish for the university to be involved out of fear that otherwise something dire might happen. What does concern us however is that, while complying with police requests to hand over students the University authorities fail to question the police as to the reasons and to seek speedy resolution. The situation is so bad that even lawyers are mostly afraid to represent students and ask them to seek help from the University.

The use of the PTA

The war is long over and the PTA is most inappropriate to deal with questions that are political in nature. To see terrorism in political gestures and political opinion that do not take recourse to violence and to respond to them by an overwhelming show of force, is both illogical and counter-productive. There is now no anti-state terrorism in Jaffna.

An important part of consolidating peace is for the State to conduct itself in a manner that induces respect for the rule of law. Of immediate concern to the University is that in 2011 student leaders were twice attacked and grievously injured by men wielding metal rods. The reasons were entirely political and they had not committed any crime. The Police showed no interest in arresting the culprits. Now using the petrol bomb explosion as a pretext the Police seem determined to detain and harass student leaders and those active who had nothing to do with the bomb.

The result is to cause considerable fear, anxiety and trauma among the students that is detrimental to the academic character of the University. More importantly dragging innocent students through police stations and police cells, as happened in the 1970s and

1980s, is frightening at the start and then hardens them and breeds contempt for the law and for the officers entrusted to uphold it. Where there should be trust and co-operation there is fear, resentment, and then defiance. Surely, we do not want the consequences of that again.

We saw no alternative but to write to you as it is far from clear who is in charge. We appeal for your understanding of the situation and urge you to take such measures to ensure that the rule of law is observed.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,

Members of the Jaffna University Community, Jaffna. 07th Dec.,2012.

Annexe

List of Names of Students

1. Selwarathnam Renuraj
2. V. Bhavananadan
3. Ambalawanapillai Prasana
4. T. Abarajithan
5. Pranadhan Sabeshkumar
6. Selvanayagam Janahan
7. Rajendran Miller Alexendar
8. kanagarasa Sanjeevan
9. Sathyamoorthi Prasanna
10. Sinnaiya Shashikantha