

**Testimony of Sandhya Eknelygoda to the  
13th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council  
Panel on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance in South Asia – Voices from the  
ground March 11 2011, Geneva**

I am representing not only myself, but also journalists who are victims of abuse of a repressive regime, the people of the North whose voices are not being heard and all wives, mothers and children whose loved ones have gone missing.

In my endeavour to find out what happened to Prageeth, I wrote to the President, the police, members of parliament and the media ministers. The response from the President's office was a letter to the police stating, "consider looking into this and take appropriate measures." But the police did not act on this. I then wrote to the Attorney General on March 9, 2010. There has been no response to date. On May 9, 2010 when the question of Prageeth's disappearance was brought up in Parliament, Media Minister Keheliya Rambukwella said he would personally look into the matter. But he hasn't said anything about it since then and remains silent on the issue. In May, during the debate on Emergency, when opposition MP Sarath Fonseka brought up Prageeth's disappearance, Minister Wimal Weerawansa said, "before questioning about others, you should produce your son-in-law to courts".

Over the past several months, a number of opposition MPs brought up Prageeth's disappearance in Parliament, but not a single government MP has responded.

On February 4, 2011 the former Media Minister said they were unable to find any information about Prageeth because of police inaction. However, in September 2011, even when the police media spokesman said the police have not been able to produce any results of their investigation, the Homagama police, submitting their objection to the Habeas Corpus case said they had submitted a report on the investigation to the Homagama Court. I have at no time been informed of this.

On August 27, 2009 Prageeth was abducted in a white van and released the next day. He was held in a torture chamber during this period. He lodged a complaint with the Homagama police about the abduction. However, the police in their objection to the Habeas Corpus said this was a lie and that Prageeth had not lodged any complaints.

This is a unique situation in Sri Lanka. Copies of complaints, especially on disappearances, lodged with the police are never given to us. If we are to obtain one, we need to get a court order. But by then, the lodged complaint goes missing. Fortunately in Prageeth's case, details of the abduction and complain, with documentary proof had been submitted to Parliament.

Additionally, I sent a petition to the UN Committee on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances in February 2010. On December 15, 2010, I also submitted a petition to the Working Committee Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. On January 24, 2011, on the first anniversary of Prageeth's disappearance, I handed over a letter addressed to

UN Secretary General Ban ki Moon to the UN resident coordinator in Sri Lanka, Neil Bhune.

On one instance, UN media spokesperson claimed the UN office in New York had not received the letter. On February 15, too they said they had not received the letter. I was distressed by this information. However, later the UN office said they had received the letter, and I am happy to note the UN office is taking an active interest in Prageeth's disappearance.

I believe it is important for world democracies to focus their attention on enforced disappearances of journalists. This is because they use their pens and pencils for the good of the community. People like Lasantha are killed, and those like Prageeth are made to disappear because of their fearless efforts to expose government misdeeds and serve the community. If Prageeth was free, today he would have revealed a lot of information.

In 2008 Prageeth wrote about the use of chemical weapons by the government forces against the people of the north. This report was based information revealed at a meeting of religious dignitaries in the north. He also wrote about the minorities and raised a voice on behalf of the displaced. Was this wrong? Were these the reasons he was made to disappear?

At this moment my two sons and I lead a difficult life. At the time of Prageeth's disappearance, I was working as an insurance agent. As I was not able to focus fully on my job after Prageeth's disappearance, I was fired. None of my colleagues have visited my house, nor called me to enquire about my plight.

There appears to be no purpose in the lives of the people of the north who have not only lost their loved ones, but all their material possessions. I tell you this from personal experience and from the interactions I have had with them on various occasions.

On the International Human Rights Day in December 2010, I held an exhibition of Prageeth's Cartoons in Mannar and shared my experience with them. These people need to be informed about their rights. The sufferings of the children need to be highlighted.

The future of these children is bleak. The government has made no effort to look into their welfare. There are not even interested in these children's welfare. The government believes, since they are in power, they have the right to violate any number of human rights. Today, the Sri Lankan media, through fear and intimidation have been forced into silence.

As a victim, my request to you is while continuing with your efforts to find Prageeth, also focus special attention of the Tamil and Muslim victims in the North and East.

I believe you have the power to force the Sri Lankan government on to the right path. In a manner similar to what you did in getting the GSP+ facilities withdrawn, you can pressure the government with other funding mechanisms. I appeal to the United Nations

and leaders of all member countries to intervene on behalf of victims of enforced disappearance and those whose human rights have been violated. If do that, you can improve, not only the future of my children and those in the North, but also create a better world for them.

Thank you