

# SRI LANKA: IS THE POLICE SPOKESPERSON LIVING ON THE MOON?

## A Statement from the Asian Human Rights Commission

Today, June 4, in the *Daily Mirror* on line edition the police spokesperson, SP Ajith Rohana, is quoted as saying “Generally, as a practice torture never takes place in Lankan Police stations.” This police spokesperson, who is also said to be an Attorney-at-Law, is further quoted as saying: “Torture is often misconstrued by the Media and the public. When the Police go to apprehend a suspect, if there is resistance the Police will use force in order to arrest him. This isn’t torture; nor is using force to prevent damage to public or private property torture”.

Perhaps, this Attorney-at-Law and the police spokesperson may have never read any of the judgements of the Supreme Court regarding the torture that has taken place in Sri Lankan police stations. These cases are in the hundreds, and the kind of physical torture includes assaults which have resulted in kidney failure (the case of Gerald Perera), instances where oedema on the brain has been caused due the victim's head being placed beneath heavy books which were then struck with bars (the case of Lalith Rajapakse), and so many deaths which have happened after custodial torture, one of the most recent being that of the death of Mr. Chandrasiri Dasanayaka of Thalpitiya at the *Wadduwa Police Station* and the killing at the *Dompe Police Station* which lead to the people attacking the station and so many hundreds of other cases.

SP Rohana seems to be a police spokesperson who does not appear to read. *The Daily Mirror* on the very same day reported in its print version several cases of torture under the title ‘Suspects claim police brutality after arrest’. One of the suspects is in serious condition and he has also been admitted to a hospital.

It would have helped SP Rohana to have looked at some audio visuals if he is not in the habit of doing any reading. Had he examined YouTube, he would have been able to watch over a hundred and fifty Sri Lankan victims of torture speaking of their ordeals with graphic detail. It is not too late for him to have a look at these firsthand accounts of torture by the victims themselves by just taking the time and trouble to go to YouTube.

If that is too much trouble, then, he could look into this documentary published by the Asian Human Rights

Commission which has already been seen by thousands of people both in Sri Lanka and outside. He may see *SRI LANKA: The Police Torture Epidemic in Sri Lanka — a documentary*

In 2011 alone, the AHRC published 102 Urgent Appeals cases which are also available on the internet [here](#). There are already 25 cases published for 2012 to date.

It may of course be no use to give reading material to this police spokesperson, but if he does care he may also read a *special compilation — torture & ill-treatment in Sri Lanka*.

Further in 2011, the AHRC also reported on 325 cases of torture in the book *Police Torture Cases — Sri Lanka 1998-2011*.

Of course, there is no point in reminding the police spokesman about the last report of the United Nations Committee against Torture which dealt at length on the torture taking place in Sri Lanka. And about so many communications of the UN Human Rights Committee where the Committee expressed views in favour of the victims of torture who went before it.

SP Ajith Rohana made this statement denying that the police in Sri Lanka have a reputation for engaging in routine torture in order to defend the new bill introduced to parliament giving the police the power to detain suspects charged under some offenses for up to 48 hours instead of the 24 hours, which has been the rule that has existed for over a century. If the police engage in so much torture within the 24 hour limit, how much torture we will see when helpless suspects have to spend twice that amount of time inside a police station.

The reported cases of torture clearly indicate that most suspects who are tortured brutally are in fact, innocent persons who have been taken into custody without any evidence and often the purpose of the arrest is to find a suspect for crimes that the police have failed to resolve. With the introduction of the new rule of detention for 48 hours, many more persons will be made substitute

criminals after brutal torture forcing them to confess to crimes they know nothing of.

Police torture in Sri Lanka has also become a lucrative business opportunity for police officers. The families are willing to spend whatever they have in order to protect their people from being tortured. Now, this opportunity for making money by the abuse of the powers of arrest and detention will naturally increase.

Besides this, Sri Lankans are today unfortunate to have people in the officer cadre blatantly lying to them without shame. Tomorrow a former Attorney General will be summoned to court to answer questions about a statement he made at the last session of the UN Committee against Torture when he was representing the Sri Lankan government. He said that he was aware of where Prageeth Ekmaligoda, the missing journalist, is now living in some country abroad. He is now being called upon to explain this statement.

The IGP likewise should call the police spokesman and question him about his statement on police torture in Sri Lanka. The IGP should show the police spokesman the letters he has been receiving about persons being tortured at police stations.

It would be less embarrassing for the IGP if he would appoint a police spokesman who has the capacity to read the judgements of the Sri Lankan Supreme Court and High Courts and also read the reports published by newspapers and human rights organisations.

*About the AHRC: The Asian Human Rights Commission is a Hong Kong-based human rights group. ■*

## Forthcoming from the SSA

**Word Style** is a practical style guide for book and academic publishing in Sri Lanka. It is based on the Sri Lankan Social Scientists' Association's professional copyediting and publishing of dozens of reputed books over the past more than a decade.

"A most valuable guide for those who seek to enhance publishing and writing in English."

• (from the Preface) Kumari Jayawardena  
(SSA, author of *Nobodies to Somebodies*)

**May F. Yee** is a Colombo-based professional book editor, from Toronto where she trained in book editing, with a degree from Carleton University in international politics and sociology.

The **Social Scientists' Association (SSA)**, Colombo, is a trilingual publisher of books and the *Polity* journal.

**SSA BOOKS**

**Word Style**

**A Sri Lankan Book  
Editing Guide**



**May F. Yee**

**Social Scientists' Association (SSA)**

