

7 September 2021

## **Sri Lanka: Human rights defender Sabharatnam Sivayoganathan summoned by Counter-Terrorism and Terrorism Investigation Division**

On 24 August 2021, human rights defender **Sabharatnam Sivayoganathan**, also known as **Seelan**, was visited by two officers from the Counter-Terrorism and Terrorism Investigation Division (CTID) at his residence, who summoned him to the Kallady Kaattukandhor police station for questioning the following day. During the inquiry, he was asked about his social media activities. The interrogation lasted for two hours after which the CTID officers informed him that he may be required to attend another interrogation at the Colombo CTID Headquarters.

[Seelan](#) is a longstanding human rights defender in Sri Lanka. During the ethnic conflict and civil war in Sri Lanka, Seelan supported victims of human rights violations in their fight for justice, many of whom are from vulnerable and impoverished communities. Seelan is an active committee member of the Batticaloa district NGO Consortium, a committee member of Transparency International Sri Lanka and the President of Batticaloa district civil society forum. Seelan has been part of several initiatives in relation to peace-building, transitional justice and the reconciliation processes. He has been vocal about the reprisals and intimidation faced by regional journalists, military land grabbing, militarization and the Presentation of Terrorism Act.

On 24 August 2021, two officers from the Counter-Terrorism and Terrorism Investigation Division (CTID) [arrived](#) at Seelan's house and handed him an official notice summoning him for questioning at the Kallady Kaattukandhor police station. On 25 August 2021 at 12.30pm, Seelan presented himself along with his national identity card, passport, mobile phone and sim cards, as requested by the officers, to the station. During the interrogation, the officers [questioned](#) him about his communications and social media activities, especially on Facebook, WhatsApp and Gmail. The human rights defender is of the opinion that the CTID is using interrogation as a means to threaten and intimidate him against participating in human rights activities.

This is not the first time Seelan has been targeted for his human rights work. On 15 July 2021, Seelan was summoned by the CTID branch of Kaatukanthor, Batticaloa and was subjected to a two hour interrogation during which he was asked about his personal life and previous occupations. He was also questioned in detail about the 700 kilometer [protest trek](#) from Pottuvil to Pollikandi (P2P) held in February 2021, including the motivation behind it, the organisers, means of funding and his level of involvement in it.

On 23 May 2021, Seelan was [interrogated](#) by CTID at his residence during the nationwide lockdown in Sri Lanka in the wake of COVID-19. On 16 May 2021, the police handed over an order issued by the Batticaloa Magistrate court to the human rights defender, restricting any public participation ahead of the annual [memorials](#) for Tamils who were killed during the civil war which takes place on 18 May. In March 2021, Seelan was issued another court order along with 26 others to stop participating in a [hunger strike](#) in Maamangam, Batticalao.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned by the recent series of reprisals and harassment faced by human rights defender Seelan, which appear to be directly related to his peaceful and legitimate work in defence of human rights.

**Front Line Defenders urges the relevant authorities in Sri Lanka to:**

1. Immediately and unconditionally cease all attempts to threaten human rights defender Sabharatnam Sivayoganathan and withdraw reprisals against him;
2. Immediately and unconditionally cease all further forms of surveillance or harassment against Sabharatnam Sivayoganathan, as it is believed that these measures are not only solely related to his legitimate human rights activities but, furthermore, constitute a direct transgression of his rights;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Sri Lanka are able to carry out their human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, in line with Sri Lanka's international human rights obligations and commitments;
4. Initiate a comprehensive legal reform process, in genuine consultation with independent civil society and human rights defenders, to review existing laws, regulations, policies and practices, especially provisions related to offences criminalising peaceful expression used to target human rights defenders, with a view to aligning them with Sri Lanka's obligations under international human rights law and standards.

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