



PEARL condemns the arrest of the Mayor of Jaffna, Viswalingam Manivannan, and demands the dropping of all charges

Washington D.C.; April 9, 2021 — PEARL strongly condemns the arrest of the Mayor of Jaffna, Viswalingam Manivannan, by Sri Lanka's Terrorism Investigation Division. We note that the magistrate has ordered his release on bail, despite the police seeking to remand the Mayor. PEARL calls on the international community to stand in support of democratic processes and demand that these absurd charges against the Mayor be dropped.

Mayor Manivannan stands accused under Section 120 of the [Sri Lankan Penal Code](#), a broad provision that includes “exciting or attempting to excite disaffection to the President or the Government of the Republic”. This charge stems from the color of the uniforms used by Jaffna municipal workers, which allegedly resemble the uniforms of the Tamil Eelam police force. The Sri Lankan government has claimed that this is an attempt by Manivannan to resurrect the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). However, any such resemblance is very obviously coincidental, and the Mayor himself explained that the uniforms were based on the design of the Colombo Municipal Council's uniforms. The attempts to draw a link to the LTTE are preposterous and a clear attempt to further the use of Sri Lanka’s authoritarian laws to stifle Tamil political expression.

The arrest is a drastic escalation in Sri Lanka’s already deepening surveillance and harassment of its Tamil and Muslim communities. Several weeks ago, the Sri Lankan government [designated](#) a number of prominent and respected Tamil diaspora groups and individuals as “terrorist entities”. Prior to this, the government also expanded its notoriously oppressive [Prevention of Terrorism Act](#), allowing the detention for up to two years of anyone suspected to have caused “religious, racial or communal disharmony”. Manivannan’s arrest in particular points to a broader trend of ongoing harassment and arbitrary arrests of members of the Tamil community, including elected officials, journalists, and human rights defenders. These actions are a brazen display of Sri Lanka’s disregard for Resolution 46/1 which passed at the Human Rights Council last month and mandates continued international attention on Sri Lanka’s human rights situation. The international community’s focus must be on protecting vulnerable communities in Sri Lanka and standing for human rights. Due to the repressive nature of Sri Lanka’s laws and consistent failure of domestic courts to bring forth justice, urging Sri Lanka to abide by “due process” is insufficient. There must be international consequences to Sri Lanka’s actions, those counter to justice and accountability, in order to prevent further backsliding.

PEARL urges the international community to join the call for Manivannan’s charges to be dropped and demand the Sri Lankan government repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act and cease the discriminatory repression of Tamils and Muslims.