



Mr Brito Fernando
Right to Life
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September 5, 2014

Dear Mr Fernando,

It is with great regret that I am writing today about the upcoming international conference, *Enhancing Human Rights and Security in the Asia Pacific*, which you were due to attend.

Yesterday the Ministry of Defence advised the Centre for the Study of Human Rights - our partner in Sri Lanka - that all Sri Lankan officials would be withdrawn from the conference if Sri Lankan NGOs were present. The CSHR sought to have this decision reversed, explaining the nature of the conference and the importance of having Sri Lankan NGOs present, but the Ministry was intractable in its decision with respect to two invited Sri Lankan NGOs, one being Right to Life.

We have discussed how to deal with this very difficult situation and come to the conclusion that in the balance, we need to ask you to withdraw from the conference. This decision has been made with a very heavy heart and so I would like to share our reasoning with you.

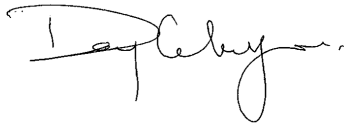
On the one hand, we are aware that in asking certain NGOs not to attend, we are capitulating to pressure and thus in a sense affirming that power can be misused in this way. We are also aware of the danger that we are sending you or other Sri Lankan NGOs (who continue to work under the most difficult circumstances) the message that we will simply cut you off when we are faced with a conflict. This is not a message we wish to send.

On the other hand, at this point, with about one hundred and thirty people from across the region confirmed from the conference, it would be a disaster for all members of the Sri Lankan forces, who have been at the heart of the project, to withdraw. In fact, should they do so, the conference would be unviable. Moreover, we believe that to insist that the NGOs come would place the CSHR and potentially those NGOs at risk of being punished for this decision.

In the face of this decision, what we would like to do is to discuss with you and other Sri Lankan NGOs an alternative NGO only event bringing together the Sri Lankan and Nepali NGOs and perhaps some other regional NGOs working in this area. You may be aware that the conference is just one way of many where we hope to disseminate and amplify our project learning. Another key activity of our project is to build networks of those working in the field of human rights and torture prevention in the Asia Pacific to exchange ideas and strategies of working outside of our organisational spheres. We have dedicated project funds to do this and would welcome working with your organisation among others in the region in finding productive ways of supporting our shared work. After this conference is over, we will be in contact to consult with you about the best form for such an activity or event, where it should take place, who should be part of it and so on.

Finally might I say how much I regret that it is in this letter rather than in Bangkok that we are making contact. I hope that we can meet face to face in the near future and find ways of cooperating.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Danielle Celermajer', written in a cursive style.

Associate Professor Danielle Celermajer
Director