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## **Sri Lanka: Threats and intimidation against human rights defender Priyalal Sirisena**

On 21 and 23 May 2023, Sri Lankan human rights defender and human rights lawyer **Priyalal Sirisena** received threatening phone calls from unidentified persons who warned him to stop his work and actions against a ‘minister’. Although the minister was not named during the call, there is good reason to believe that the threats are linked to Priyalal Sirisena’s legal action against a powerful elected official in Sri Lanka for contempt of court.

[Priyalal Sirisena](#) is a human rights defender and lawyer who has dedicated himself to supporting and advocating on behalf of victims of human rights violations, especially victims of custodial [torture](#) and arbitrary detention, in Sri Lanka. The human rights defender has represented groups such as the Small Scale Fishers (SSF) in seeking justice against large scale licence holders whose practices cause marine destruction which impact their livelihood. He is a vocal advocate against the abuse of anti-terror laws and was part of the legal team that [opposed](#) the Counter Terrorism Bill in 2018. Priyalal Sirisena has engaged with national and international stakeholders to raise awareness of Sri Lanka’s human rights record including by coordinating the national civil society submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review in 2017 and 2022.

More recently, Priyalal Sirisena has been involved in a legal case against a State Minister for contempt of court based on this minister’s public criticism of the magistrate court’s decision to grant bail to protesters linked to the economic crisis. Two charge sheets were filed against the minister in this case on 23 February 2023.

On 21 May 2023, the human rights defender Priyalal Sirisena received two phone calls from a foreign number. The unidentified caller warned him to withdraw any actions taken against ‘the minister’ and threatened him with consequences if he failed to comply. Concerned for his safety, the human rights defender filed a complaint with the Kurunegala Police in the North Western Province on 22 May 2023. The following day, at approximately 9:30pm, he received another threatening call from a different foreign number, which he recorded. The unidentified caller warned Priyalal Sirisena to withdraw whatever action he had taken against the minister or face the consequences.

Prior to this, on 9 May 2023, two unidentified persons on a motorbike visited Priyalal Sirisena’s residence in Kurunegala and asked his mother about the human rights defender’s whereabouts. Priyalal Sirisena believes that the threats and intimidation are linked to his legal action against the powerful state minister and are aimed at silencing his work.

Sri Lanka has seen a rise in reprisals and intimidation against human rights defenders, and in this climate there are reasons to fear for the human rights defender’s safety. Front

Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the threats and intimidation against Priyalal Sirisena which it believes are linked to his legitimate and non-violent human rights work.

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

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the threats against human rights defender Priyalal Sirisena with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Ensure the physical and mental integrity and safety of Priyalal Sirisena and his family members;
3. Ensure that all human rights defenders in Sri Lanka can freely and safely carry out their important work in promoting and protecting human rights, without facing any form of harassment, threats, or restrictions.