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Sri Lanka: Ven. Galwewa Siridhamma Thero, Convenor of the Inter-University Bhikkhu Federation (IUBF) remanded

On 23 November 2022, student rights defender **Ven. Siridhamma Thero** was granted conditional bail by the Colombo Magistrate Court. Siridhamma Thero was arrested on 18 August 2022 from a peaceful protest in Colombo linked to the ongoing economic crisis. The human rights defender has spent nearly 90 days in detention under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). Despite being granted bail, Siridhamma Thero was brought before a different court on the same day, at the Kaduwela Magistrate, and remanded in a separate case until 6 December 2022.

Ven. Galwewa Siridhamma Thero, is a prominent student leader, human rights defender and an education rights activist. He is the convenor of the [Inter-University Bhikkhu Federation \(IUBF\)](#), which has played a critical role in the ongoing peaceful protests, along with the [Inter-University Students Federation \(IUSF\)](#). These protests are primarily linked to the economic crisis, but also raise broader issues of governance, higher education, corruption, state repression and accountability.

On 18 August 2022, student leaders Siridhamma Thero and [Wasantha Mudalige](#) were arrested along with 18 other protesters while returning from a protest against state repression in Colombo. Several hundred student protesters, including human rights defenders, marched peacefully towards the city center in Colombo outside the railway station. The protest was blocked and dispersed by police officers armed with tear gas, water cannons and batons. Police chased and assaulted protesters as they fled the site. At least 20 persons were arrested while leaving the protest and held at police stations overnight. While others who were arrested following the protests have been released, Wasantha Mudalige and Galawewa Siridhamma have been detained under the repressive Prevention of Terrorism Act for nearly 90 days in extremely harsh conditions and limited facilities, including access to healthcare and sanitation.

In October 2022, Siridhamma Thero's family raised serious concern about his health while in detention and alerted authorities that the human rights defender and Wasantha Mudalige were unwell and in serious need of medical treatment. Following multiple public requests, on 25 October 2022, Siridhamma Thero and Mudalige were admitted to Colombo National Hospital where Siridhamma Thero was diagnosed with Dengue fever. After nearly three months of detention, on 23 November 2022, the Colombo Magistrates Court released the human rights defender on bail. Conditions include an overseas travel ban, monthly visits to the Terrorism Investigation Division, and a warning that his bail would be canceled if he was involved in any similar offense.

Despite being granted bail, Siridhamma Thero remains incarcerated. The same day, on 23 November, police produced Siridhamma Thero before the Kaduwela Magistrate in separate case. This case is linked to a peaceful students protest organized by the IUSF near the Education Ministry (Isurupaya) in Pelawatte, Battaramulla on [10 June 2022](#). Siridhamma Thero was not named or arrested in this case prior to 23 November. The police conduct in producing him before the Kaduwela

magistrate and raising his involvement in the June protest is clearly aimed at further punishing the human defender and ensuring that he remains in jail on multiple cases.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemn the arrest, detention, and continued incarceration of Ven. Galwewa Siridhamma. The right to peaceful protest must be ensured under national and international human rights commitments. The use of legal sanctions and anti-terror laws against student leaders and human rights defenders is against Sri Lanka's public commitments to human rights and to preserve the right to peaceful dissent. The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka in a public statement 22 August 2022, has raised concern regarding the use of PTA against protesters. Human rights defenders are key to find constructive solutions to overcome economic and political unrest in Sri Lanka. Punishing and harming human rights defenders and filing multiple cases to prolong incarceration is not the solution for the crisis.

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

1. Immediately drop all fabricated charges against Ven.Siridhamma Thero and Wasantha Mudalige and release them;
2. Respect the rights of freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly, including to participate in public protests;
3. Cease the persecution and intimidation of students, union leaders, teachers, principals, academics and others involved in recent protests in the country;
4. Guarantee the protection of the human rights of all PTA detainees including guarantees of due process and a fair trial, and protection from arbitrary arrest, detention, torture or other ill-treatment;
5. Immediately review the detention of those held under the PTA, ensuring adequate access to fair bail hearings, legal counsel on a confidential basis, to family members at regular intervals and immediate release for all those not facing international recognizable charges;
6. Repeal the PTA and issue an immediate moratorium on its use; and
7. Facilitate access to adequate health and mental care and reparations to those whose human rights have been violated due to the use of the PTA.

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