



**PERMANENT MISSION OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST
REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA TO THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE, GENEVA**

Tel : (022) 919 12 50
Fax : (022) 734 90 84
E-mail : prun.geneva@mfa.gov.lk
Web: www.lankamission.org

56, Rue de Moillebeau
1211 Geneva 19
Switzerland

8 June 2020

H.E. Michelle Bachelet
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Excellency,

I write with reference to the news release titled "*Asia: Bachelet alarmed by clampdown on freedom of expression during COVID-19*" issued by your Office on 3 June 2020, citing remarks made by you and referring, among other countries, to Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka associates itself with the joint press release issued on 5 June 2020 by the Permanent Missions of Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam, in Geneva, in this connection.

The damage that misinformation and disinformation can wreak, particularly during the time of a pandemic, on the public's right to scientific and accurate information, is immense. Accordingly, it has become essential that the spread of false or misleading information is addressed by law enforcement authorities, in the interests of protecting public health as provided for under relevant human rights instruments. Further, the consensus resolution on COVID-19 Response adopted on 18th May 2020 at the 73 World Health Assembly also, *inter alia*, calls on Member States to provide the population with reliable and comprehensive information on COVID-19 and take measures to counter misinformation and disinformation.

In this regard, I wish to bring to your attention that, the Government of Sri Lanka has, for several months now, been engaged in the task of protecting the health and safety of its population from COVID-19, amidst a multitude of other challenges associated with facing a global pandemic of this scale. The success of the ongoing efforts of the Government, which were also commended by the World Health Organisation, enabled containing this highly contagious disease and protecting the public, especially the vulnerable segments of society. This has been possible, largely due to the collaboration of all stakeholders with the national response, as well as the communication of accurate information to the public.

The internal directive issued by the Acting Inspector General of Police on 1st April 2020 does not carry instructions to arrest persons for mere criticism, or for sharing fake or malicious messages, except in the case of violations of the laws of relevance on; obstructing a public servant in discharge of his/her duty, wrongful restraint of a public servant, use of criminal force to deter a public servant from discharge of his/her duty, disobeying a quarantine order and acts of disruption of public law & order and quarantine procedures using computer technology.

In this context you would appreciate that the Government has taken these measures in accordance with the due process of law, and in the interest of public safety and health, with the aim of curbing falsehoods that have harmed or have the potential to affect all sections of society during this pandemic.

Therefore, while reiterating Sri Lanka's commitment to the protection and promotion of human rights in terms of the Constitution of Sri Lanka, the Government of Sri Lanka urges your Office to be sensitive to the above unprecedented challenges faced by countries and to engage in a spirit of cooperation.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.



Dayani Mendis
Acting Permanent Representative