

**Media Statement**

**02.03.2017**

**Violation of editorial independence behind the arbitrary removal of “Irudina”  
Editor – Free Media Movement**

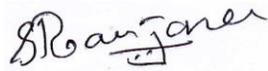
The Free Media Movement affirms that arbitrary termination of the service of journalists is a grave threat to the media freedom, condemning the removal of “Irudina” Editor, Wimalanath Weeraratne by the management of the newspaper and thereby prejudicing editorial independence. The management had called Mr. Weeraratne without any prior notice and demanded to step down and since he refused, he was given a letter of termination prepared by them. He had returned it to the management along with a letter stating that he has not committed any violation that can lead to disciplinary actions.

The management had expressed its discontent to some articles that criticized shortfalls of the good governance published with the intention of moving it forward. It was revealed that they did not endorse an article written by the editor, which condemned the government ministers’ criticisms against a new constitution and emphasized the need of drafting a new constitution as promised by the government. With these circumstances, the Editor was removed from his position suddenly on the 28<sup>th</sup> February, in order to fulfill the management’s requirement of arbitrary influencing the freedom of editing.

On the same day, a new Editor was called and the staff was requested to support him. Seven journalists who refused it and submitted a letter supporting Mr. Weerartne were prohibited to enter into the premises today (02<sup>nd</sup> of March) with a printed order attached to the gate. It is unfortunate that demanding justice for a colleague threatens the job security of journalists. This illustrates the vulnerability of that media profession, where journalists can be controlled arbitrarily by the management.

It is pleased to note that this group of journalists has lodged a complaint at the police and the Labor Commissioner as a collective activity to protect their rights. The Free Media Movement believes that

it is ordinary to suspend a journalist due to the violation of disciplinary rules, unable to fulfill duties or bankruptcy of the institution. However, it considers that this arbitrary removal of journalists and threatening the editorial freedom is a grave attack to media freedom. Initiation of media institutions without any transparency of the owners, closing them down within a short period of time and making the journalists unemployed that were common incidents during the past are also considered by the Free Media Movement as events that hinder the realization of a better media culture. Further, not implementing a proper recruitment policy, non-issuance of appointment letters, not making duly payments are also threatening the employment security of media personnel. Irudina Newspaper is also undergoing such circumstances and Mr. Weeraratne was given a termination letter in a context where he did not receive a letter of employment. Therefore, the Free Media Movement urges the management of Irudina to respect editorial independence and deliver the justice for the journalists whom the job security is under a threat.



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