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Mr. Mahinda Rajapakshe
President
President's House
"Temple Tree"
Colombo 3
SRI LANKA

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HTUR/FW

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Intimidation and threats of abduction to trade unionists

Dear Mr. President,

The ITUC, which represents 168 million workers through its 304 affiliates in 153 countries and territories, including Sri Lanka, protests vigorously against the increasing risks to which trade unionists, while carrying out their legitimate activities, are exposed in your country.

On 6 February, three men, including a trade unionist, were abducted in Colombo by unknown groups. This sparked a spontaneous protest the next day in front of the Fort Railway Station. Two days later, on 8 February, your government declared that the abducted men, including the trade unionist, were in government custody, and that they were being interrogated on suspicion of collaboration with insurgents.

This seems to fit in with a campaign explicitly aimed at linking trade unionists with terrorist insurgents. Key trade union activists who participated in the Fort Railway Station protest on 6 February are now being publicly accused of being covert terrorist operatives. Since 8 February, posters depicting trade union leaders as traitors and terrorists have begun to appear in many parts of the country, calling for their arrest. **Anton Marcus** of the Free Trade Zone and General Services Employees' Union (FTZGSEU), which is affiliated to the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF), **Sman Ratnapriya** and **Ravi Kumudesh** of the Health Sector Trade Union Alliance (HSTUA), **Sampath Rajitha** and **Raja Kannangara** of the Joint Railway Trade Union Alliance (JRTUA), and **Joseph Stalin** of the Ceylon Teachers' Union (CTU) are among the targeted trade unionists.

As a result of these false allegations, several threats, including death threats, have been made against trade unions. In view of these alarming developments, on 21 February, the FTZGSEU and the HSTUA lodged a number of complaints with the police, in order to seek protection for their right to continue their activities as trade unionists and, indeed, for their lives. The law enforcement authorities, however, have hitherto failed to take constructive measures in order to guarantee their safety .

Mr. President, the exercise of trade union rights is enshrined in International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions nr. 87 (on Freedom of Association) and 98 (on the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining), to which your country is a signatory. Your government should therefore take measures in order to provide a climate in which these rights, as stipulated in the abovementioned ILO Conventions, can be implemented. The ITUC urges you to take immediate measures in order to:

- guarantee the safety of all trade unionists under threat, and ensure an environment which is free of intimidation and is conducive to a normal development of trade union activities;
- investigate the complaints lodged by the aforesaid trade unionists and guarantee their safety;
- ensure the due process of law on all acts of threats and intimidation.

Yours sincerely,

General Secretary