

PTA

TERRORISING SRI LANKA
FOR 42 YEARS



Socio-economic and psychological impact
on families of PTA detainees following
the Easter Sunday Attacks Sri Lanka

PTA: Terrorising Sri Lanka for 42 years

Socio-economic and psychological impact on families of PTA detainees following the Easter Sunday Attacks

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“When I was in prison, I met and spoke with other Tamil PTA prisoners, some who had been there for 10 years, with their files not even taken up yet. I was terrified wondering if the same thing would happen to me...”

- L.T. Jesmin, one of five men from Horowpothana arrested under false charges in 2019

Introduction

This research was undertaken to highlight the socio-economic impacts faced by the families of those arrested and detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). The PTA has predominately targeted men belonging to ethnic and religious minorities (Tamils and Muslims), and their arrests leave the women and families vulnerable. The women have to bear the brunt of the socio-economic impact of these arrests.

Women are left to care for the elderly and their children, and generate an income in order to survive. They also have to liaise with lawyers and visit the arrested men. An increase in poverty levels and indebtedness, is an additional consequence of the arbitrary arrest and detention of primary income earners. Thus, this indirectly places an additional burden on the State. Further, as society tends to buy into the government narrative and stigmatise such families as “terrorist families”, these families also face social ostracism and psychological trauma.

Guilt by Association

In the immediate aftermath of the Easter Sunday Attacks of 21st April, 2019, hundreds of Muslims were rounded up and arrested under the PTA and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Act of 2007. According to lawyers working on PTA cases,¹ at least 500 Muslims, between the ages of 18 and 49, were arrested and detained under the PTA, following the attacks. Of those arrested, 98 were from Kattankudy, Batticaloa, the hometown of Zahran. To date, 92 of the 98 detainees from Kattankudy remain in remand custody, with 6 persons having been released on bail. In one particular instance, 65 Muslim youth and men were arrested under one charge. The arbitrary and sweeping use of the PTA follows the pattern of its over-use and abuse against the Tamil community during the three decades of ethnic conflict. It has contributed greatly to further polarizing communities and deepening the divides.

Whilst it is recognised that those involved in violent terrorist activities must be held accountable under the law, arresting and detaining a number of family members under the PTA, purely based on suspicion is deeply problematic. These blanket arrests deny the presumption of innocence, create an environment of guilt by association, further polarises society, intensifies the spread of Islamophobia and creates a deep resentment among the largely peaceful Muslim community. Arbitrary arrests under the PTA are often ‘witch hunts’ targeting a minority community or dissidents, or it is a means of collecting evidence. This is a rampant violation of fundamental human rights.

These cases exemplify the urgent need to repeal the PTA, a long-standing call by victim families and local and international activists and rights groups. Furthermore, the sweeping arrests under the PTA and the treatment of detainees expose the deeply ingrained prejudice towards

¹ From Colombo and the Eastern Province

ethnic/religious minorities, failures of the law enforcement and prison systems, and the need for urgent reform.

Historical Context

The PTA is a draconian law introduced in 1978 to legitimize the State's use of brutal force and inhumane 'counter terror' tactics to quash the Tamil insurgency spearheaded by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Since then the PTA has been used disproportionately against people of Tamil ethnicity, subjecting them to arbitrary arrest, prolonged detention without charges, inhumane detention conditions, torture, forced confessions, post-release harassment and restrictions, including re-arrests. Currently, at least 146 PTA detainees ²(including 6 women and a 1½ year old infant with a heart ailment), continue to languish in prisons around the country.³

As at 2015, the actual number detained under the PTA was unknown, but a list of 182 persons detained under the PTA, and remanded at 11 official remand prisons, was compiled and released by the Department of Prisons. However, the list did not include those being held at detention centres such as Boosa and the Terrorist Investigation Department (TID) in Colombo, and this indicated that the actual number of persons arrested and detained under the PTA at the time, would have been far higher.⁴

Some of the types of cases flagged at that time by the Watchdog Collective⁵ included:

- Persons who had been in remand for 18-19 years without having their cases concluded;
- Persons in remand for 15 years prior to charges being filed;
- Persons in detention for 15 months prior to being produced before a Magistrate and being remanded;
- Persons who were brought for 400-500 court hearings whilst in detention, without seeing a conclusion to the case,
- An instance of 15 cases filed against one person at 6 courts across 4 districts; and
- Instances of persons who were released as innocent and discharged from all charges after 5-6 years in detention, only to be subjected to post release harassment, including re-arrest.

Islamophobia and Media Complicity

The Easter Sunday attacks triggered yet another wave of Islamophobia which has been on the rise since the end of the war in 2009. This general hostility towards the Muslims, fanned by irresponsible media houses further exacerbated the situation, resulting in the Muslim community being made more vulnerable.⁶ The cases of Dr. Shafi who was falsely accused of carrying out

² As per the cases handled by Centre for Human Rights and Development (CHRD).

³ Anuradhapura 21, Batticaloa 04, Jaffna 01, New Magazine Prison 100, Welikada 05, Colombo Remand Prison (CRP) 08, Mahara 03, Welisara 01, Colombo Crimes Division (CCD) 03.

⁴ Watchdog Collective, *PTA detainees – Ignored under "Yahapalanaya?"* - <https://groundviews.org/2015/09/05/pta-detainees-ignored-under-yahapalanaya/>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The media held to be most complicit in fanning racial tensions and expressing anti-Muslim bias include: Derana, Hiru, Divaina and Lankadeepa

mass sterilisations on Sinhala women,⁷ and the Horowpothana Five (*details of these case studies are given below*), are clear examples of the media destroying the lives of 6 men and their families, by spewing lies, and peddling on innuendo and hate speech. To date, no media institution has been held accountable for their irresponsible actions.

"We want to take action against the media. They are the ones that destroyed our lives with their lies. They must be held accountable for their irresponsible reporting, somehow. We want a retraction and apology published on the Lankadeepa cover page, like when they published lies about my husband," said J. Hairulhudha, wife of one of the five men arrested under false charges, in Horowpothana last year.

Many families of detainees spoke of being ostracized in their communities and even their children facing harassment from fellow classmates and teachers. *"Everywhere we would go, people would say 'here comes the IS[SIS] crowd. Our children would be asked why their father was in jail? And if he was an IS[SIS] terrorist? We had never even heard of who Zahran was until the attacks. Why was this happening to us,"* many wives and mothers of those arrested following the attacks, lamented.

Lack of Support and Indebtedness

Having lost the sole breadwinner, many of the families had to find alternate sources of income. Whilst relatives did their best to support these families, they still had to take out loans or pawn their possessions, to be able to afford lawyer fees, transport costs for prison visits, and pay for food and school expenses for their children. Furthermore, due to the stigma attached to those who were arrested and the heavy surveillance on these families following the attacks, people were reluctant to loan money to these families or support them in any way.

It was particularly difficult for the families where the women were not accustomed to going out of the house on their own. Such women and their families had no means of fending for themselves. One such case was a wife from Kattankudy, who used to be a seamstress and do piecework for a nearby garment factory. When her husband was around, he would collect the supplies she required and take the finished products to the factory. Now she is unable to do that work because she does not have support to get her the necessary material or collect the pieces from her. It is culturally not acceptable for an unrelated man to come to her house. So now, she is struggling to pay back her loans and make ends meet. None of these families have received any support from the government or any other groups, and in the absence of the sole income earner of their families they are in dire straits

The following are 10 interviews carried out with family members of 8 Muslim men, a boy and a woman who were arrested in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday Attacks last year. In addition, five men who were arrested in Horowpothana under false charges were released on bail last November. Interviews with two of them are also included below.

⁷ Sunday Observer, *"The media has killed us" : Kurunegala doctor's wife speaks out -* <http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2019/06/16/news-features/%E2%80%9C-media-has-killed-us%E2%80%9D-kurunegala-doctor%E2%80%99s-wife-speaks-out>

Family - *Fatima (mother), 53, Eastern Province, Sri Lanka

Detainee - *Infas (son), 21

Currently Detained – Kegalle Prison

Charge – Went to Nuwara Eliya for Bayan organized by NTJ

Occupation – Sales Representative, Hardware Store

Marital Status – Single

Dependents – Single parent mother, tailor

*Fatima's husband abandoned the family after the birth of their third child. She later sold her house to educate *Infas, and they've been living in rented premises ever since. As her older two sons are married, it was *Infas, the youngest, who was taking care of his mother and 75-year-old grandmother. *Infas earned Rs. 30,000 a month, and would give his mother Rs. 25,000 to run the house.

*Infas had joined some friends who offered him a free trip to Nuwara Eliya, to listen to a Bayan (sermon). He was not told anything more than that. However, he had told his mother that he was going with some friends for a party, and had left on Friday evening. When he returned on Saturday night, he told his mother where he'd been and about the Bayan (sermon), and said that he had felt "betrayed by NTJ".⁸ "That alone should prove that he's not a terrorist," his mother said. He went to a regular mosque. It was not even a NTJ one".

It was the second day of Ramadan (May 9th 2019), my son and I were resting at the back of the house. "He told me he would go and buy samosas for breakfast once he woke up." Later that day, two vehicles with Police and CID officers came to our house and had asked for *Infas. The police said they had to take him in for questioning. I said he hasn't done anything wrong. "They took his phone also and checked it, and later returned the phone but, not my son," said *Fatima. He was first detained at the Kattankudy police and later transferred to the Batticaloa prison. "They took him from our house, but they wrote on the charge sheet that he was in hiding. When they read out the charge sheet, I asked them why they were lying, but, they still didn't change the statement," she said. When *Infas was produced before the Magistrate for the first time also, I raised this same issue, and the judge also asked as to why it had been stated that *Infas was in hiding if he had been arrested from his home.

Now that he has been transferred to Kegalle, which is a predominantly Sinhala speaking area, "we can't go there by public transport, so about 15 families whose children are also being held in Kegalle, all contribute towards hiring a van with a Sinhala speaking driver, and travel together. Once I add the cost of some food for him, to my travel cost, it costs me at least Rs. 5000 per visit. We try and visit them once every two weeks at least. The travel back and forth takes up the entire day, and I get to speak to him for about 20 minutes.

"Initially he told me that they were packed like sardines, where everyone had to sleep on their sides. He said they couldn't sleep or pray properly, and that it was very dirty. Now he says the conditions have improved. He keeps telling me whenever we meet, 'you brought me up not to even hit anyone out of anger, to never be violent. Now look at what has happened to me.' If he

⁸National Thowheeth Jama'ath (NTJ)

had done something wrong, I can understand, but why is he paying the price for something he hasn't done? I believe God will help my son because he knows he's innocent."

We asked her what she needs to get by and she said she is in need of a sewing machine so she can sew pieces for the many garment factories in the area, as it's something that she can do from home, and will generate some income for them to live on till *Infas is released. The machine costs Rs. 40,000 and she cannot afford to buy it.

Family – *Renoza (wife), 39, Eastern Province, Sri Lanka

Detainee - *Riyaz (husband), 43

Currently Detained – Monaragala Prison

Charge – Went to Nuwara Eliya for Bayan organized by NTJ

Occupation – Technician, CTB

Marital Status – Married – 3 daughters (07, 12 & 14).

Dependents – Wife and 3 children

Travel Allowance – Rs. 2600 from ICRC every 45 days (received once as at 11th Jan. 2020)

A neighbour, Rauf (from the NTJ), had asked *Riyaz and another friend, Zubair to attend a 3-day Bayan in Nuwara Eliya, but, Zubair and *Riyaz had returned within one day as they had not liked what was being said there. *Riyaz prays at a regular mosque, not at a NTJ controlled mosque. *Riyaz worked as a technician for the CTB, and after his arrest, his wife was given a one off payment of Rs. 37,000 (Employees Provident Fund and Employee Trust Fund). Thereafter, they have had to find ways to fend for themselves.

*Riyaz was arrested from his home on the 3rd day of Ramadan (10th May 2019). The police had gone looking for him at the bus depot and then come to his home. *Renoza had asked them why he was being taken, and that he's not even a member of the NTJ. They had said it was because he had gone for the Bayan in Nuwara Eliya. (The police referred to the Bayan as a training.) *Renoza was 5 months pregnant at the time of *Riyaz's arrest. She had the baby in September but, the baby had passed away shortly after birth.

"Immediately after my husband's arrest, all my neighbours came over and told me that he was innocent and he should not have been arrested. They would come every evening during Ramadan and comfort me, and told me to be strong. My brothers don't come home to see me due to the heavy surveillance I am under, and as they belong to different mosques, there is also some tension between our families.

Currently, *Renoza lives with her children, in the same compound as her mother and sister. She is dependent solely on her in-laws, which she is very unhappy about, as her husband had always provided for them. "Whenever I visit him, my husband always asks me how we're managing," she said. He shares his cell with two others, so *Renoza now knows them. The families travel together to visit their family members in detention. They travel for half a day and are only permitted to speak to their detained family members for 20 minutes. During the Christmas holidays, she was able to take her children to see their father twice.

Even though my husband is brought to the Batticaloa Magistrate every 14 days, we are not permitted to see or speak to them, nor are we permitted inside of the courtroom. Families of all other detainees can enter the court, but they don't allow families of those arrested following the

Easter Sunday Attacks. The police have told us that they were following the judge's orders. We can only try and catch a glimpse of them in the bus or as they walk to and from the courts, and we try and communicate with them using sign language.

"Fridays are particularly difficult for me, as my husband used to take the children to the beach every Friday. They especially miss their father on Fridays," she lamented. "I used to give tuition classes from home, but, since his arrest and the death of my baby, I haven't been in the frame of mind to teach. Also, I have had no time as I have had to run around attending to my husband's case and taking care of the children. Once my cut (from the Caesarian operation) is healed, I hope to start teaching again," she said.

*Renoza is also considering sewing pieces for garment factories, which will pay her a paltry Rs. 15 per maxi dress (Long dress) and Rs. 5 per skirt. A maxi sells for about Rs. 700 (and deducting about Rs. 300 for the material and Rs.15 for the labour), a huge profit, is made on each garment, of which the women sewing the pieces see very little.

Many families like *Renoza, had originally paid a lawyer Rs. 10,000 each, to prepare their respective files, but he never appeared for them. Therefore, they all had to pay another lawyer, Ratheeb, who had then taken on their cases. The previous lawyer never returned the family's money to them.

At the interview it transpired that her monthly expenses, comes to approximately Rs. 50,000, and that includes her children's schooling expenses which amount to approximately Rs. 12,000 a month. She prioritises her children's schooling expenses.

Family – *Shahira (wife), 31, Eastern Province, Sri Lanka

Detainee – *Umar (husband), 38

Currently Detained – Trincomalee Prison

Charge – Suspected of being involved in Aliyar junction clash in 2017

Occupation – Tailor

Marital Status – Married – 2 children (boy – 6 & girl - 10).

Dependents – Wife and 2 children

Travel Allowance – Rs. 1250 from ICRC every 45 days (received once as at 11th Jan. 2020)

In 2017, there was a big clash in Kattankudy between Zahran and his followers and another sect of Muslims, at the Aliyar junction. *Umar was arrested by the Kalmunai Police, on the 13th of May, 2019, but, released shortly after, as it was a case of mistaken identity. Shortly afterwards, he was re-arrested as he was allegedly on a list of those involved in the 2017 clash.

*Shahira tries to go and visit her husband *Umar, once every two weeks. She is not permitted to give him home-cooked food, only a lunch packet. When the children are free, she takes the children to visit their father. There is a small-meshed screen between visitors and detainees, through which they have to shout to each other as they're quite a distance apart and there are many people visiting at the same time. "We are only given 5 minutes to talk," said *Shahira tearfully. On Christmas day, families were given an open day, where they were permitted to speak to detainees for 15 minutes, whilst being able to sit across the table from one another. "I took the children on open day to see their father but, he was not even able to touch them, or

take the picture of our son's first day of school picture to his hands. I had to hold it up for him to look at," she cried.

"When we got back home, I told my son not to tell his school friends that his father was in prison, as I didn't want him to face any problems at school. I told him to say that his father was working in a shop outside of Batticaloa. My son asked me, why I wanted him to lie? I felt so ashamed and hopeless. I don't know what to do. Zahran has destroyed all our lives. My husband is innocent. Please do something and get him out," pleaded *Shahira.

Since his arrest, over the last 8 months, *Shahira has been selling household and personal items, to survive, as she didn't want to ask anyone for help. She also sold some of the pieces she had made for garment factories, and her husband had told her to now sell her sewing machine as well to earn some money.

Her husband would bring the unfinished pieces home and then take the sewn pieces to the factory. As this job of supplying the factory is only done by men in Kattankudy, she did not wanted strange men to walk in and out of her house, so she stopped sewing once her husband was arrested. For a short time, a friend's would bring pieces for her to sew, but, of late, her friend is not responding to her calls, and so she has no way of getting the pieces to sew.

Soon after the attacks, everyone kept their distance from her and her family, and she had no support. Now things have improved a bit. Her brother-in-law, who lives overseas, tries to support her a little, but she feels bad to keep asking him for help. "My husband always provided for us. We hear stories of women who are running to and from Quazi courts, due to their husbands not providing for them or ill-treating them. I never thought I would be in this plight as my husband always provided for me," she said.

She observed at the interview, that she needed a female runner to transport the pieces, between her home and the factory.

Family – *Rasheeda (mother), 67, Eastern Province, Sri Lanka

Detainee – *Asma (daughter), 36

Currently Detained – Dumbara Prison

Charge – Aiding and abetting terrorism (Wife of NTJ leader, Niyaz)

Occupation – Part time tailor and housewife

Marital Status – Married – 3 children (2 girls –7 & 10 & boy - approx. 6 months)

Dependents – Mother and 3 children.

Travel Allowance – Rs. 3200 from ICRC every 45 days (received once as at 11th Jan. 2020)

Niyaz, *Asma's husband, had been working in the Middle East since 2017. He returned to Sri Lanka in March 2019, and on the day after the Easter Sunday attacks, packed a bag, took both his and her phones and left the house, without telling *Asma where he was going. *Asma had then told her mother that Niyaz had left home. On the 26th of April, we heard about the suicide explosion in Sainthamaruthu, Ampara, and on the 27th of April, 2019, the Police brought an image of Niyaz, and asked her to come and identify his body, as he had been in the house in Sainthamaruthu. The police had then searched her house and found her medical file and a motorbike, of which they took the registration book and keys and went. After identifying the

body, *Asma returned home later that day. On the 28th of April, she was asked to come in for questioning, so she went along with her brother. She also wanted to have her husband's body released. Once they got to the Ampara mortuary, she was told that the OIC was not there, and for her to stay the night and that the body would be released in the morning. That day, they issued a Detention Order, and transferred her to the Batticaloa prison. She was 5 months pregnant at that time. She gave birth to a baby boy 3 months later whilst in prison and was transferred to Dumbara, 7 days after the baby's birth.

"When they were at the Batticaloa prison, I would go see my daughter and grandson daily, but now I can barely afford to go visit them once in two weeks. I bought them a fan and a water heater when they were at the Batticaloa prison, but they haven't transferred her to Dumbara. I hope another mother is benefitting from it at the Batticaloa prison. My daughter is not used to cold weather, and so has been getting ill often, so she made a special request to the judge to be transferred back to Batticaloa, but he had said that it was not within his jurisdiction. My daughter doesn't know anything about the NTJ," lamented Asimya's mother, *Rasheeda. Also, the police have written in her charge sheet that she was arrested whilst in hiding, even though she went to the station when they called her.

"We have to pay Rs. 2000 per seat for the van to Dumbara every 2 weeks. I try and take the children also when I can. In addition, I try and take foodstuff like dried fish and beef, milk powder, sanitary napkins, pampers etc., so it's quite an expense. NTJ members don't take dowry, so they were living on rent after marriage. My daughter used to work as a tailor, but her husband stopped her from working after she got married. He was working as a driver in the Middle East and would send her Rs. 40,000 each month. She would also make clothes during festival time and sell them for some additional income.

"My elder granddaughter is very bright and is studying for her year 5 scholarship at the moment. It costs about Rs. 750 a month for her tuition classes, so she told me that she can study at home, and to save her mother the expenses for tuition and put the money towards the expenses related to her mother's case and prison visits. My heart broke, as all the other children are going for tuition, and she should go too, if she is to get good marks," said *Asma's mother.

*Rasheeda herself is suffering from two blocked arteries. All the necessary arrangements have been made for her surgery, at the Jaffna Hospital. She had tried to get back the baby's pillow that had also been left behind at the Batticaloa prison when her daughter was transferred, but, when she got to the prison, everyone had been masked, and the guards had told her not to enter as she was old, and could catch the virus that had spread throughout the prison.

"I'm very worried for the health of my daughter and grandson as they're not used to the cold. Apart from the prison visits, I only get a glimpse of them when they are brought to the Batticaloa courts every 14 days," she said.

In the face of such challenges, she is looking for support to pay for her granddaughter's monthly tuition of Rs. 750 and additional support for the upkeep of the children, as she is old and sick and has no source of income.

Family – *Nadeeha (mother), 59, Eastern Province, Sri Lanka

Detainee – *Nihal (son), 18

Currently Detained – Kegalle Prison

Charge – Went to Nuwara Eliya for Bayan organized by NTJ

Occupation – Student

“It is regular practice here, especially for youth, to be taken on sightseeing trips, free of charge. Hisbullah took busloads of people, free of charge, while also providing them with food, to go and see the Islamic campus he was building. Often people organize Jamath (exchange retreat programmes) free of charge too. So, it wasn’t considered to be unusual when the boys were asked to join a Bayan in Nuwara Eliya free of charge. They’ve also never been to Nuwara Eliya, so they were typically excited to see a new place,” said *Nadeeha.

*Nihal had left home on Friday after lunch at around 1pm, and returned home on Sunday early morning. When I asked him what it was like, he just said, there was a bayan, they had been given food and then they slept and returned. “Later we found out that after the bayan, Zahran had come with a sword, and threatened all the boys not to speak to anybody about what was said in the bayan. So, nobody had spoken,” she added.

On the 09th of May, 2019, the police had come to their home and wanted a picture of Milhan. When they had come, Milhan’s younger brother *Nihal, who was studying and fasting for Ramadan at the back of the house, walked out. The police asked him to bring his ID, and come with them for questioning. The police spoke politely in Tamil, and then took him and went. After a while, *Nihal’s father had gone to the station and asked for him, but they had said he wasn’t there. Thereafter, *Nadeeha went to get her son, and they showed him to her and said that as he was young (18), they wanted to get as much details from him as possible. She told the police that *Nihal was not involved with the NTJ, and so to please release him. They said that they had to question him further, and get more details.

They questioned him non-stop till the following afternoon, and then told his mother to bring something for him for breakfast, and a change of clothes. His mother arrived with the food and clothes at about 2-2.30pm on Friday, to find her son now in a cell in handcuffs. The police then told *Nadeeha that they had to take him to courts and that therefore she couldn’t give him anything. She however, somehow fought with them and gave her son the food and clothes. She then saw about 10 handcuffed men being taken away, two by two, in police jeeps. When she tried to follow them, the police stopped her and told her not to come. Later, she heard that Nihal had been arrested. She only saw him once after he was put in prison.

*Nihal’s father is 67 years old and also very ill. He is a mechanic. He has currently gone to visit their elder son, Milhan, who is detained on the 4th Floor of the CID headquarters in Colombo. “We have another son who is 27, and who is physically challenged, and cannot do anything for himself. We need to dress him, bathe and feed him. We also have a daughter who is studying for her Ordinary Level (O/L) exams. Milhan has been the primary bread-winner for the family.

“When *Nihal was at the Batticaloa prison, he managed to get some coaching on computer and other subjects, as there were some teachers also who’d been arrested. He needs to study for his A/L exam this year, but the authorities won’t give him access to any books inside the prison. And now, he’s been transferred to Kegalle, where there’s nobody to help tutor him even. My

husband tried to take some notes to him, but they had prevented him from giving the notes to him. I will try my luck the next time I go to visit.

*Nihal's father is the only income earner at moment, but he too is running around with our sons' cases, so we have had to borrow money, as we have to make visits to three locations to visit our two sons and daughter-in-law, in Kegalle, Colombo and Trincomalee, respectively.

Our elder son's wife, fainted when I went to see her the first time. She kept asking about Milhan. "She's very innocent, and doesn't know anything. She's still in shock from everything that's happened. She's been kept in a separate women's section. *Nadeeha can sew, but she doesn't have any time to do so now, she said.

*Nadeeha too has heart problems and has a stone in her gallbladder but, they are unable to operate on her, as she is a heart patient, so she's in a lot of pain due to the stone. She has scheduled an Angiogram in Jaffna, as she is very sick.

They are in dire need of financial support, as both parents are ill, they have two other children to look after, and it is expensive to undertake periodic prison visits to 3 different locations.

Family – *Fareeda(wife), 37, Eastern Province, Sri Lanka

Detainee – *Ahmed (husband), 39

Currently Detained – Badulla Prison

Charge – Created web page for a registered Islamic charitable organisation, run by NTJ, in 2015.

Occupation – Computer teacher for 20 years, and owned a computer shop

Dependents – Wife and 3 children (Two girls aged 8 & 10 & 1 boy 1.5 years)

Travel Allowance – Rs. 5650 from ICRC every 45 days (received once as at 11th Jan. 2020)

On the 10th of May, a friend who lives nearby *Ahmed's shop in town, had called *Fareeda and said that the police were looking for her husband. So *Ahmed went to the shop and opened it for them to search. As *Fareeda's sister-in-law lived near his office, she had informed *Fareeda that there were many military and police outside the shop. So *Fareeda and her brother had immediately come to the shop too. Thereafter, a van and a jeep full of military personnel had come to their home and searched everything, including their garbage. An officer named "Chamara" had handed over a form written in Sinhala to *Fareeda, who had signed it even though she didn't know what it was, as she was scared. Subsequently, she had found out that it had been an arrest warrant.

Then they took him and his computer away. The police had come back to pick up the computer charger, and told her that they were at the last part of the investigation now. When she went to the police station, the police had told her that he was not there. They said that they would finish questioning him and then return him. She received no further news of him that day, and then they contacted her the next day (Saturday), and asked her to bring her children and something for breakfast, and come to see *Ahmed. "When I met my husband, he told me to only tell the police what I knew and not to say anything more, as he had been asked the same question multiple times over," she said.

*Ahmed had created a web page for a charitable organisation run by the NTJ mosque, in 2015. Zahran's brother, who lived nearby had asked *Ahmed to create the web page. "They are still a

balance payment of Rs. 6000 pending for the job, that they haven't paid my husband," she added.

"We were able to have our daughter only after trying for about 4 years, so my husband was very fond of her, and so she keeps asking when her father is coming home. It's very sad and frustrating for me to have to answer my children's questions daily. It has put a huge strain on me," said *Fareeda.

"My daughter wrote a letter in Sinhalese asking to visit her father, and so we were allowed to visit him for 15 minutes in Badulla. When I took our children to see their father, they didn't even allow him to touch our infant child. They also didn't permit me to hand over a letter written by my daughter to her father. It was a heartbreaking letter. In Batticaloa we had to speak through a glass, but, at least in Badulla we can see him directly. We travel for 15 hours, leaving home at 5.30am and returning home at midnight, to see him for 15 minutes. She tries to go visit him every 15 days, sometimes with the children, sometimes alone. Even though it's an exhausting journey, at least we get to see him, so that's enough. The Badulla prison has much better conditions than the Batticaloa one, but, it's so much harder for us to access. I want to get him out somehow! The main problem is that 65 people have been taken under this one charge, so it's very hard to get him cleared," said *Fareeda.

*Fareeda too has studied IT and English and used to give tuition classes in 5 subjects, to about 20 children, at home, but has stopped now, as she has to run around handling issues relating to her husband's case and as she's mentally not able to manage everything on her own.

"Everyone has been good to me, as everyone knows that my husband is innocent. He went to a regular mosque. He used to be in charge of the monthly zakat collection on behalf of the mosque federation, to be donated to the poor. This year, only his name was not there in the bulletin," she said.

"On the first day of school, my daughter wanted to take a picture with her father, but, as he wasn't there, he held a picture of her father in her hand and asked me to take a picture. It was heart breaking, said *Fareeda.

She hopes to start tuition again as soon as she feels up to it, and she also has a sewing machine, if she can get some work.

Family – *Husna (mother & wife), 37, North Western Province, Sri Lanka

Detainees – *Mujeeb (son), 16 & *Hakeem (husband), 40

Currently Detained – Keppetipola Probation Centre & 4th Floor, CID office, Colombo

Charge – Went to Nuwara Eliya for Bayan organized by NTJ & alleged involvement in destruction of Buddhist statue in Mawanella in 2018.

Occupation – Student & Mawlawi

Marital Status – NA

Dependents – two children (Son aged 12 and daughter aged 3.8 months)

Lawyer – Ratheef

ICRC – Rs. 2920 x 45 days (husband) & Rs. 4500 x 45 days (son) – Travel allowance for visits

*Hakeem was working in Qatar at a legal office for 10 years, until he returned to Sri Lanka in 2017. Thereafter, he lived with his wife and children in Kekunagolla, and preached on and off at local mosques as he was a Mawlawi. He was opposed to NTJ and Zahran, his wife said. In December 2018, he took his son with him to Nuwara Eliya for a *Bayan* (sermon). *Mujeeb had only gone on a trip to Nuwara Eliya, not necessarily for the *Bayan*. Following their return from Nuwara Eliya, he fell out with his wife's father over a land dispute, and having left their home, returned to his hometown in Kattankudy, Batticaloa in January 2019. Thereafter, he hadn't picked up any of his wife's calls.

On the 24th of April, 2019, officers from the Katupotha police came to *Husna's home, to inform her that her husband had been arrested in Dambulla on his way to Kattankudy, the day before, on suspicion of being involved in the Easter Sunday attacks. They had then asked that she come with them to the Police station to give a statement. They had asked her, when her husband returned from abroad, if he visited other countries, if suspicious people stayed in the hostel rooms (upstairs) that they gave out on rent etc.,

Two months following his arrest, *Husna took her children to visit her husband at the 4th Floor, SIU II office in Colombo, as her children were asking for their father. When she got there, she asked her husband why he was arrested and why he did this. He told her that he wasn't involved. She asked why he hadn't picked up her calls or come to see them. He said that he couldn't live with her father, and so couldn't live near him. She was only able to speak to him for about five minutes.

On the morning of 16th of August, 2019, the Katupotha Police came once again to their house, and ask *Mujeeb to come with them to Ampara for questioning by the CDB branch. *Mujeeb was accompanied by one of his father's relations in Kattankudy. First, *Mujeeb was taken to a vacant house in Ampara for questioning. He was told there to say that he had undergone 4 months training with the NTJ, that then they would release him. So, he had done as he was told as he had been afraid. He had begged the police not to take any photographs or videos of him, as he was still schooling (O/Ls), and hadn't wanted to ruin his academic future. Despite his pleas however, his image had appeared in the media in the days that followed.

After they took *Mujeeb for questioning, *Husna waited by the roadside for him to return. She then tried his phone, but it was switched off. Having waited till about 4pm in the evening, she had left for Ampara, to check on her son. When she found her son, he cried, and when she asked why he'd been taken, he'd said it was because of the Nuwara Eliya trip. He told me that he thought that they were trying to get his father in trouble, through *Mujeeb's testimony. *Hakeem's charge is regarding his alleged involvement in destroying a Buddhist statue in Mawanella in December 2018. However, this is a false charge, as he was in Mecca at the time, said *Husna.

"My son was a very conscientious student. He was studying for his O/L's last year when he was taken from our home, and even though he was being detained at the Probation Centre in Keppetipola, and he had his admission form, they didn't permit him to sit for his exams. I have his official attendance sheets attested by his school Principal, proving he had a near perfect attendance at school, so there's no way he could have attended a 4 month-long training," said *Husna.

"I'm also not permitted to visit my son. Even prisoners are permitted visitors. I don't understand why they're not letting me see my son. I was able to go see my son once for about 15 minutes at the Probation Centre, since he was detained. But, thereafter, the judge has denied granting the Probation officer permission to grant me access to him. The judge went on to question the Probation officer as to why he permitted the mother to visit the son once, without her having approved the visit. I only get to have a glimpse of him every 14 days when he's brought to Ampara for his hearings," she said.

She had even complained to the HRC, who had instructed her to get a letter from the GS and go and visit her son. However, the local Probation officer told her that she couldn't visit her son unless the judge approved the visit.

"One time when he saw me, he signed and asked for food. I was heartbroken, because my son was always well fed at home, and he would laugh and play with his siblings and cousins, and was a very happy boy. He now looked thin and haggard, and was feeling very low. The last time I saw him on the 11th of February, this year, I was able to give him some clothes and biscuits. I was also able to speak to him from outside the cell for about 5 minutes. He cried and told me that he couldn't stay like this any longer and for me to please get him out," lamented *Husna.

The judge had said at the last hearing that they were waiting for instructions from the AG's Department with regard to *Mujeeb's release.

In terms of income, *Husna's in-laws give her a little allowance whenever she comes to Ampara every 14 days. In addition, since the attacks, she has undertaken some tailoring from home, so she's able to make around Rs. 7000 a month. She doesn't have boarders any longer, so that income is no more. Some of her neighbours also give her rice and some rations when they can. "When we have food, we eat. If not, we don't," she said. She needs about Rs. 25,000 a month for the children's schooling and to run the house. Currently, she doesn't also have money to send her son for tuition. She used to be part of a group that made stockinette flowers to export but after the attacks that too had stopped. She is not hopeful she can re-start that project as everyone looks at them differently now.

"My son got chickenpox as a newborn baby, and barely survived. He was kept in the ICU and he was the only child that survived in his ward. The doctor told us to be very careful with him thereafter. When he was seven, he used to get fits too. He had got fever whilst in detention last December, and the ICRC had to medicate him, as it had affected his heart as well. As his mother, I'm very upset, as I can't take care of him myself," she said sadly.

"Please get my son out somehow. I can't even visit him. I don't even know why. It's very difficult for me to keep travelling to Ampara. He too has to travel overnight, with a stopover in Monaragala, to come to courts every 14 days. He wants to do his O/L exams and continue with his schooling. He's still very upset that his face was publicized in the news. He's very sad and thinking too much all the time. Please, I want to have him home in time for Ramadan," said *Husna.

Family – M. Naseeba (29)

Arrestee – N. Zakariya (40), Hijrapuram, Kebitigollewa

Currently – Out on bail (since 19th Nov. 2019)

Charge – Accused of having received funds to his account from Zahran.

Dependents – Three children (girls aged 10 & 7 & son aged 3)

On the morning of 25th May, 2019, the Horowpothana police came and took Zakariya from their home. Her uncle accompanied him to the station and returned saying that the police had said he would have to be there for 3 days. Naseeba then went to the station with her children to see him. Thereafter, the Kebithigollawa Magistrate said that he had to be kept for a further 7 days, and thereafter their detention kept getting extended every 14 days. They were kept in this manner for 7 entire months.

“When the police came to our house, they accused me of having cooked for Zaharan. We know you’re Tawhid Jama’ath. We know you worked for Zaharan. I told them that I had never seen him in my life. They didn’t believe me and insisted on searching my house. The STF also came to the house and searched it four times over. They of course didn’t find anything, she said.

“All Muslims believe in Tawhid, as it means that God is one. That he is indivisible. It’s got nothing to do with terrorism. It’s just that NTJ happened to have Tawhid as part of their organisation’s name. If you’re going to arrest all Tawhid Muslims, you’ll have to arrest all of us,” Zakariya explained with a laugh.

“My father stayed with me and the kids for the first 3 months, but thereafter he had to return to his home, so we stayed alone. I would visit daily with food for my husband at the Anuradhapura prison, except for Sundays which was a holiday. I would often take my youngest child only with me for company, and also because it was too expensive to take all 3 everywhere. As it would take 3 buses to get to the prison by public transport, it was cheaper and easier to pay for the fuel, and go with a neighbour by motorbike, as it was 55kms one way from our home to the prison. After all this trouble, we would only be able to see my husband through a glass or small net screen, for about 5 minutes. If we got the glass screen, we couldn’t talk to each other, and if we got the small net screen, we couldn’t see each other. And he couldn’t even hold our children. When the children saw their father, they would start crying and ask to stay back with him. It was very depressing,” she said.

For any trip to the hospital, it would cost us Rs. 500 (one way) to the Kebithigollawa Hospital. My father and neighbours would help out as much as they could. I would wake up early, cook food, go visit my husband, return home and make food for the next day. In addition, I had to look after the children and see to their needs as well, all on my own. As soon as the children would wake up, they would ask for their father, and I didn’t know what to keep telling them,” she added.

“My children’s friends would ask her why her father was in prison? And they would come back home and ask me who ISIS was. Our eldest was always first in class, but, after her father was arrested, she was very upset and couldn’t study properly. Another child refused to keep going to school because her teacher had hit her saying her father’s in prison. So now she’s studying at a

school in my father's village. My other child told me that he would grow up and join the police so he could arrest ISIS people, because his father was arrested for no reason because of them. I lost 12kgs in 7 months. I cooked but didn't feel like eating," she recalled sadly.

Now, although Zakariya is home, he missed last year's harvest season, so he now has to wait for the next one. He is also ill, and cannot work much, so it's an additional problem.

She expressed the need for a sewing machine to earn an additional income.

Family – J. Hairulhudha (29)

Arrestee – L.T. Jesmin (33), Hijrapuram, Kebitigollewa

Currently – Out on bail (since 19th Nov. 2019)

Charge – Accused of having received funds to his account from Zahran.

Dependents – Two children (son aged 5 & daughter aged 2)

"On the 25th of May, 2019, there was a loud banging on our door. The children were woken up from their sleep, and they took my husband away for questioning. They initially said he'd be returned in three days, and later said seven days. And then they kept extending this time period. I only have my father, so I went with the children to stay with him in Horowpothana. It was two hours (one way) to the Anuradhapura prison from there, so it was very difficult for me to travel to and fro. I would go to the prison daily with food for my husband. It would be around 8pm when I got home, so my children would already be asleep. The children also couldn't go to school properly. On the day of their school concert, they were asking for their father, and it was very difficult for me to cope. I was like a mad person during those days. I would forget to put salt or onions when I was cooking," she lamented.

"I had to pay the lawyer Rs. 10,000 every 14 days when the case was heard in the courts. It was very difficult because I had only my income to manage all the expenses. I would earn Rs. 35,000 a month, from which I had to pay Rs. 20,000 for the lawyer, Rs. 10,000 as loan repayment installment to the School Society, and Rs. 2000 as Society membership fee. Now everyone I took loans from is asking for me to pay them back, so I am still paying back the loans each month. My family helped me out with food and Rs. 2000 a day I needed to go visit my husband daily. I had to take so much leave, now I have no leave left for the year" she said.

Although her husband is home now, he's still unable to work until the case is complete, and can't do any hard labour because he had heart surgery done after the accident. "My husband can't work in the village, because everyone is against us. Even the front house neighbours, who we know were part of those framing us. When the STF was searching our house, the front house people had told other neighbours, 'we have taught them a good lesson'."

"My husband met with a bad accident about 10 years ago, and was severely injured, so he required a commode, but we couldn't even afford to install one. We don't even have electricity because we can't afford to get the wiring done, and the government won't install it for us. All our crops got destroyed last year. We could only afford to put roof sheets for half of our roof only. So, half has roofing sheets and half tiles. When it rains most of the house gets flooded. We don't have a proper roof but people are saying we had *Koti* 100 (Rs. 1 billion) hidden in our roof pipes. What a joke. We found out who Zaharan was only after the attacks," she added.

"My neighbours used to make fun of me and say my husband was ISIS. For seven months I didn't go anywhere because everyone would say '*ISIS kattiyaenawa. Okkollamathrasthawadeen,*' (here come the ISIS crowd. They are all terrorists). I would only go to work and return home. Many refused to lend me any money also, saying we were ISIS. It was mentally very traumatic," she said.

As her father is alone, if something happens to him, she has to take care of him as well, because her other siblings don't give much support. Even when her husband was arrested, she had to see to everything for her father, so it was very hard. "When I took the children to the courts on his hearing dates, and the children would see the prison bus come, they would shout saying that their "father's bus" had come. They had asked the Police to speak to their father once, but the police had scolded them and pushed them away, saying that they were ISIS. Now we know everyone and everything to do with the police and courts and we know about the PTA and ICCPR etc., Before we didn't know anything," she said.

"We want to take action against the media. They are the ones that destroyed our lives with their lies. They must be held accountable for their irresponsible reporting, somehow. We want a retraction and apology published on the Lankadeepa cover page, like when they published lies about my husband," she said angrily.

Family – A.S.S. Ayesha (36)

Arrestee – M.B. *Hakeem (44), Horowpothana

Currently – Out on bail (since 19th Nov. 2019)

Charge – Accused of having received funds to his account from Zahran.

Dependents – Five children (sons aged 9, 4 ½ & 3 & daughters aged 11 & 6)

"My husband was the first of the five to be taken by the police. They came with guns at about 5.05am on the 25th of May, 2019. The police asked why our children were crying, and that they would return my husband after taking a statement. The STF came and searched our house, and took all our IDs and bank books. The TID later asked the STF to return everything to us. They handcuffed him and took him to his work place at the District Secretariat office, humiliating him in front of all his colleagues, to check his work space. Thereafter, they brought him back home in handcuffs in front of his children, to search his house. I immediately called Naseeba to check what was going on, and only then found out that 4 others, including Zakariya had been taken," she said.

"I'm a teacher at an interior school in Horowpothana. I would cook, go to school, teach, go to prison to visit my husband with food, and return home. I was late to school every day, as I had to cook food to take for my husband and see to many things before leaving for work. My children's friends made fun of them and bullied them asking if their father was in ISIS. They were very scared and were very upset with their father. Our eldest is very bright, but she got so upset over her father's arrest, that she stopped going for classes, and didn't pass her scholarship exam last year. When I start thinking about those days, I want to howl and cry," she recalled.

The midwife who used to weigh children at Ayesha's house every month, stopped coming after *Hakeem was arrested. *Hakeem was given a letter from his office at the DS stating compulsory

leave. They didn't interdict him. Therefore, he was able to return to work as soon as he was released on bail. Some of his colleagues had told *Hakeem that he had *Koti* 100 and didn't even tell them about it, and many started avoiding him. "So, he speaks to those who speak to him. What else is he to do," asks Ayesha.

"My biggest problem right now is paying back all the loans I had to take during that time. I make Rs. 40,000, from which Rs. 20,000 gets cut for the loans alone, leaving not much for the running of the house and the children's expenses. And the other main thing is I want the media to clear my husband's name because they are the ones that ruined our lives with their lies," she said.

Detainee – N. Zakariya (40), Hijrapuram, Kebitigollewa

Currently – Out on bail

Charge – Accused of having received funds to his account from Zahran.

Marital Status – Married

Dependents – Three children (girls aged 10 & 7 & son aged 3)

On the 24th of May, 2019, the Horowpothana police came to Zakariya's house and took him in for questioning. He was at the station from 2-8pm without being questioned, and then at around 8.30pm, was told that he could return home and that they'd call him back if needed. It was during Ramadan and he hadn't been given anything for breakfast, so he had just had water and waited till he returned home later that night. The next morning, nearby shopkeepers were saying that 5 people were going to be arrested from their village that day.

At about 5.30am on that day (25th), the Horowpothana police came once again to Zakariya's house and taken him in. Four others, L.T. Jesmin, M.B. *Hakeem, S.A. Irfan and S.A. Kalifatullah were also arrested on the same day. Three days later, they were produced before the Medical Officer. The Horowpothana police handcuffed *Hakeem when he was at home in front of his family, then took him to his workplace at the DS office, where he was displayed before all his colleagues, and thereafter only taken to the police station. They had then taken him back to his home to search it.

The police had shown them a news article that appeared in the Lankadeepa regarding Zaharan having allegedly deposited 100 *Koti* (one billion SLR) money into their accounts, and asked for an explanation from them. When they had denied getting any money, the Police had told them that they would be released if they would testify against two others named Niyaz and Abu Bakhar, also from the village. They had refused as they didn't want to lie and frame others. Further, they all categorically state that they had never met or spoken to Zaharan, and that they had only properly heard about him after the attacks. "We have asked authorities to cite even one sermon where any of us have ever preached anything that can be interpreted as being terrorist. We have not built a thing using Saudi money. Everything we've built has been fundraised locally. We have only one mosque here. Basheer and the others have 3," they said.

"Leave alone *Koti* 100, if we had at least 5 lakhs with which to complete our house, it would have been a big thing. One of us don't even own a bank account. Another, doesn't even have enough money to build a proper toilet or roofing sheets to cover the entire ceiling," they said laughingly.

Subsequently, the five of them were detained at the Anuradhapura prison, with four of them being transferred to the Wariyapola prison after 14 days. Initially the five of them had been

charged under a separate number, but thereafter they were put under the same number as Niyaz and Abu Bakhar so it was then more difficult to get them out, even though the police had no evidence against them. The Kebitigollewa police confirmed that there was no evidence against them, and that they were being framed due to a personal vendetta against them by Basheer and his group. He had asked the group why are they (Basheer and them), so angry with you all? He also added that Zahran had never visited this area.

Initially when they were being detained, and as it was Ramadan time, they had not even been provided with food to break-fast. However, later when they all found out the truth and that there were not terrorists, everyone had felt sorry for them and treated them well.

Zakariya said that they were framed due to personal vendettas against them by some in the community. The vendettas are due to their political affiliations and interpretation and practice of Islam, as well as some family feuds. "We know for sure we were framed, also because on the day of our arrests, the entire village knew 5 people were going to be arrested from here. How did they know this, unless it was some of them who had framed us," said Zakariya.

Basheer, one of the men the group believes was responsible for framing them, has a daughter who is married to Zakariya's brother. His brother had taken a loan of Rs. 200,000 from Basheer to buy a lorry and as he was unable to pay him back, so Zakariya had sold his cows and returned the money to Basheer.

"Further, another of Basheer's men, Nawaz's wife runs a Montessori in the area, and as we also run one, and it's doing well, Nawaz and them were also quite jealous. Therefore, they took advantage of the attacks, to frame us and get rid of us, said Zakariya.

"We are JVP supporters, and we are strong believers in the importance of education, especially as we didn't have many opportunities when we were growing up. We also practice a less rigid and more practical interpretation of Islam, which some groups here are against," he said. *Hakeem and others in this sect have been preaching in Tamil in addition to Arabic since 2000, and therefore have been considered anti-Islamic by these groups. "What's wrong with speaking in a language people understand? And what's the point of preaching in Arabic if nobody can understand what you're saying," he added.

"Some of the points of contention between our two sects, include our interpretation of the Quran's teachings, such as, Muslims being permitted to donate blood outside the community to save a life, we don't accept dowries, it's not compulsory to wear the cap or ankle length, white attire to go for prayers etc.,

Finally, on the 19th of November, they were given bail and released from the ICCPR charge. However, the PTA charge is still ongoing. The police visit out homes regularly, and the CID has told us that we can't go to pray at our mosque. It has been closed since the attacks last year.

"We still have to face a lot of stigma, because people still say 'here come the *Koti* 100 group,' and even our children have got harassed saying that their fathers are terrorists. None of us can go back to work or go overseas until this case is over. Crimes OIC Jayawardena told us that he knew we were innocent, and that we were taken on intelligence received from the Western province," said Zakariya.

The Colombo TID had told them that investigations are now complete, and that their files have been handed over to the AG Department. They need to issue an order from there to dismiss our case. Until then, the case will continue to be dragged on.

Detainee – L.T. Jesmin (33), Hijrapuram, Kebitigollewa

Currently – Out on bail

Charge – Accused of having received funds to his account from Zahran.

Marital Status – Married

Dependents – Two children (son aged 5 & daughter aged 2)

“I used to give tuition classes at home, but, after my release, nobody sent their children because they were scared that I was linked to ISIS. Our house doesn’t have any proper doors or windows. We’ve taken loans to build the house, and we now have no idea how to pay everything off,” he said.

“We were betrayed by our front house neighbours. I’ve been back more than 2.5 months (at the time of writing) now, and they’ve not even once asked how we’re keeping. If they have a clear conscience, they shouldn’t have a problem coming and talking to us no,” he added.

“When I was in prison, I met and spoke with other Tamil PTA prisoners, some who had been there for 10 years, and their files had not even been taken up yet. I was terrified wondering if the same thing would happen to me. All through my time in prison, my only thoughts were of my children, and if they were safe. Now that I’m back, I never leave my family alone, because I’m not sure what my neighbours might do, because we don’t even have any proper doors or windows.” His wife said with irony, ‘mekathamai *Koti* 100 gedara’ (this is the billion- rupee house.”

“Our own people betrayed us,” said Jesmin sadly.

Recommendations

To the Judiciary

- Fast-track and bring to a speedy close all cases of those persons who are:
 - Under the age of 18 held at probation centres,
 - Falsely charged under the PTA, ER or ICCPR, and currently released on bail,
 - In prolonged detention without charge,
 - Who have spent 5-10 years in prison prior to being sentenced.
- Order the proportionate payment of compensation (that also takes into consideration reimbursement for the expenses already incurred by detainees,) by the State, to all those who have been falsely charged, discharged of all charges after multiple years in prison/detention, subject to torture/inhumane treatment, and forced confession
- Authorise/permit regular prison visits by family members, including probation and detention centres, and
- Ensure as far as possible, that prisoners are held at prisons closest to their homes, so as to minimise the time and funds that families must incur on travel.
- Enable all families to access court hearings, as it is their right to know and understand the status of the case.

To the Media

- Empower media regulatory bodies to take strict legal action against media institutions and hold them accountable for fueling ethnic violence through fake news and racist propaganda and fabricating news and supporting disinformation.
- Media regulatory bodies must ensure that media institutions accused of defamation and fabrication of false news, publish a prominently placed retraction and apology to the victims and their families, and be made to pay punitive damages for the destruction of lives and reputations.

To the Government

- Provide support to all families of PTA detainees similar to the support offered to families of regular prisoners, including livelihood and educational support for children
- Support families by clearing their debt on their behalf, and offering a no-interest Government issued loan repayment scheme that they are able to pay off gradually over a long period of time.
- Ensure that all minors/students arrested and detained under the PTA, are entitled to pursue an education, by way of access to text books, extra tuition classes) and examinations.
- Provide special provisions for pregnant women and women arrested with infants/children, such as house arrest or protective custody, particularly in instances where the woman has no family support/guardian for the child, or is breastfeeding, so that the child does not have to grow up inside prison.
- To carry out urgent reform and a reassessment of the effectiveness of the prison system, and standardize resources and humanize regulations practiced by prisons, including increasing the duration of visitation, removing all screens and enable physical contact between inmates and their families during visitation, keep inmates at prisons, ideally in their home district or at the closest possible prison, as families must incur huge costs, and often travel for almost a full day, across districts, to visit their detained family member/s for a mere 5-10 minutes.

To Non-Government Organisations

- Provide livelihood support and technical expertise, including a practical business/marketing plan to women left with the burden of fending for their families, so that livelihood initiatives are sustainable and lucrative.
- Provide free legal aid and adequate travel allowance for prison visits, so as to minimise expenses incurred by detainee families.

"My neighbours used to make fun of me and say my husband was ISIS. For seven months I didn't go anywhere because everyone would say 'ISIS kattiya enawa. Okkollama thrasthawadeen' (Here come the ISIS crowd. They are all terrorists). I would only go to work and return home. Many refused to lend me any money also, saying we were ISIS. It was mentally very traumatic."

said J. Hairulhudha, wife of L.T. Jesmin, one of five men from Horowpothana arrested under false charges in 2019.

This report highlights the socio-economic and psychological impacts on families of persons detained under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) arrested following the Easter Sunday Attacks in 2019. The PTA has predominately targeted men belonging to ethnic and religious minority communities (Tamil and Muslim) in Sri Lanka. Their arrests have left the women in their families particularly vulnerable, as they've had to bear the brunt of the economic burden and social stigma on their own.