

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

SRI LANKA: Release on bail of Ms. Balendran Jeyakumary after 362 days in detention without charge.

Geneva-Paris, March 20, 2015 – The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, an OMCT-FIDH joint programme, welcomes the release of Sri Lankan human rights defender Ms. Balendran Jeyakumary after 362 days in detention without charges, but calls for all restrictions to be lifted and for an immediate and unconditional ending of any acts of judicial harassment.

On March 10, 2015, the Magistrate Court of Hulftsdorf approved the bail application of Ms. **Balendran Jeyakumary** after 362 days since she was detained without any charges, following the payment of a 200,000 LKR bail (\$3,300). However, she is still be subjected to some restrictions, including monthly police reporting and having her passport confiscated. Six other detainees were also released on the same day.

On March 13, 2014, Ms. Balendran Jeyakumari and her 13-year old daughter Vithuskaini, were arrested after having been campaigning against enforced disappearances. While Vithuskaini was subsequently placed under the care of Probation and Child Care Service, Ms. Jeyakumari was held in Boosa detention centre under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), according to which a person can be held without charge for up to 18 months if accused of “terrorist connections” with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)¹.

The Observatory is extremely concerned by the use of the PTA by the Sri Lankan authorities to undermine the legitimacy of the peaceful activities of human rights defenders in Sri Lanka. For instance, according to reliable sources, Ms. Jeyakumary’s detention has been perceived as a measure aimed at intimidating the whole of human rights defenders working in the country. Around 300 political prisoners are still being held under the PTA, which contravenes Sri Lanka’s obligation to ensure that due process guarantees are respected for all detainees. In addition, the implementation of such a law is coupled with intimidation and harassment on the part of the military and security forces against families of those forcibly disappeared, Tamil activists, and other human rights defenders in the North and East of Sri Lanka.

The Observatory welcomes the release on bail of Ms. Balendran Jeyakumary, and calls upon the Sri Lanka authorities to immediately and unconditionally put an end to any act of harassment against her, including at the judicial level. In addition, the Observatory hopes that her release can mark the beginning of a broader reversal of the pattern of harassment of human rights defenders in the country.

For more information, please contact:

- **OMCT: Miguel Martín Zumalacárregui: + 41 (0) 22 809 49 24**
- **FIDH: Audrey Couprie/Arthur Manet: + 33 (0) 1 43 55 25 18**

¹ On March 18, 2014, the Representative of the Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations in Geneva made a public statement about the supposed terrorist affiliations of Ms. Jeyakumary Balendran and other human rights defenders in jail, in response to concerns raised by several NGOs during the 25th session of the UN Human Rights Council.