

## **An Open Letter to HE the President & the Hon Prime Minister**

H.E Gotabhaya Rajapakse , His Excellency the President

Hon Mahinda Rajapakse, Prime Minister

### **Violence in State-managed Universities**

As you know, violence in state universities have been escalating in recent times. What we saw last week at University of Sri Jayawardenapura (where the young person is still battling for life in the ICU) is one grave atrocity amongst many, which have been taking place in all universities.

Due to the serious escalation of violence in universities in the past several years, the University Grants Commission steered a study during 2018 to identify the extent of the problem and the causative conditions. The findings are given below in summary:

- In the years 2016-2017, about 88,000 university students were accommodated in 17 state-managed universities
- Although 106,000 students qualified to enter universities, only about 19,000 (<20%) were given placements  
About 45-55% of all students are subject to violence and abuse, conducted in the guise of 'ragging'. Some undergo extreme violence in the form of 17% physical abuse, 11.4% sexual harassment, and 44.4% psychological abuse
- About 1989 students left university during 2015-2017, about 200 students are receiving treatment for mental health related issues, and over several years 17 students have committed suicide, triggered by ragging
- Students who get high z-scores, males, those who reside in hostels and clergy are mostly at the receiving end of this harassment
- Extreme fear of students, the indifference and passivity of academic staff and lack of action by law enforcement agencies against perpetrators (except in few cases), have led to the escalation of violence, and to the extent of brutality and serious torture
- Outcomes of ragging include sleep deprivation, anxiety and depressive symptoms, suicidal tendencies and suicide. Particular students are isolated and socially excluded. Ragging promotes an unhealthy campus culture which discourages individual initiative, idealizes mediocrity and gendered academic spaces. The culture distances students from staff and silences some students

A related situation occurs in the form of physical and emotional punishment to school children, leaving mental scars that have serious consequences. It is also documented that victims of corporal punishment in school has a higher likelihood to be perpetrators of violence as adults.

We would like to draw your attention to the gravity of this issue and to kindly consider the following suggestions in relation to eliminating all criminal activity in educational institutions.

1. Publicly condemn and renounce all forms of physical, sexual and emotional violence in universities and genuinely pledge to take remedial action immediately

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*The **Coalition against Violence in Universities** is an independent and apolitical group of academics, professionals & concerned citizens which aims to persuade authorities to end all violence on campus.*

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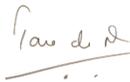
## COALITION AGAINST VIOLENCE & HARASSMENT IN UNIVERSITIES

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2. Invite all Vice Chancellors with Deans, for a discussion on the atrocities taking place in their universities. Describe with pictorial and other evidence, this extremely disturbing situation. Emphasize their role, and the need to be responsible and accountable for violence within their respective institutions.
3. Develop a scheme of rewards for university academics, Deans and Vice Chancellors who pro-actively denounce violence in any form. And, who demonstrably take action to eliminate violence, to be rewarded academically and nationally through honors or other mechanisms. Whereas for academics who are complacent whilst knowing that violence continues to be meted out to freshers, appropriate action to be taken. This mechanism to be woven into the academics' key performance indicators (KPIs) structure with necessary penalties as well as rewards.
4. Ensure that the authorities overseeing university education (including the Minister, Deputy Minister, and the UGC) are fully empowered to initiate inquiries and to take violence-related disciplinary processes to completion, so that they can work with the Police and all relevant institutions without any form of interference – political or otherwise.
5. Enable a robust *Victim Protection System* and a *Witness Protection System* so that complaints can be made by those affected, sans fear of intimidation.



Prof Harendra de Silva  
(Founder Chairman Child Protection Authority)



Dr Tara de Mel  
(Former Secretary Ministry of Education & Higher Education)

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