

COALITION AGAINST VIOLENCE & HARASSMENT IN UNIVERSITIES

15 March 2020

Open Letter to all Vice Chancellors

On behalf of the *Coalition against Violence & Harassment in Universities*, we draw your attention to the escalation of violence & brutality within universities.

The tragic incident where an undergraduate from USJP is still battling for life, is the most recent atrocity which has shocked the nation.

As you probably know, 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 Advanced Level 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

The 1998 Act 20 (*The Prohibition of Ragging & other forms of violence in Educational Institutions*) defines these acts of violence as criminal acts and stipulates that a court can direct a vice chancellor to expel any student found guilty of any of the offences under the said Act e.g. ragging, criminal intimidation, hostage taking, wrongful restraint, unlawful confinement.

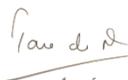
Indeed it is the abundant duty of a VC to file a complaint with law enforcement authorities if any student commits acts that fall within the scope of any of these offences.

The Circular issued by the former UGC Chairman (December 2019) also highlights and reminds you of your responsibilities in this connection.

As senior academics responsible for the welfare of your students we urge you to take serious note of this grave situation, and not be negligent and indifferent to this grave human tragedy.



Prof Harendra de Silva
(Founder Chairman Child Protection Authority)



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

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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