

COALITION AGAINST VIOLENCE & HARASSMENT IN UNIVERSITIES

Open Letter to the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Directors
CVCD should stand together to eliminate ragging and violence in universities in Sri Lanka
June 6, 2020

As universities and other academic institutions are gearing to reopen after the COVID-19 lockdown, students will be returning to an unsafe space as demonstrated by incidents just prior the lockdown and before. The Vice-Chancellor of a university is the chief executive of the institution with the responsibility and the requisite power to reinstate universities as institutions where students learn, question, and re-learn in an environment free of violence and harassment. There is a groundswell of public support for such chief executives in universities who are taking the lead.

In a widely acclaimed TV interview conducted in September 2019, The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ruhuna stressed the importance of university leaders standing up to pressures from politically motivated student groups, in order to protect innocent students. In his interview, he claimed that ragging even involves the rape of female students (නවක වදායේදී ස්ත්‍රී දූෂණය පවා සිදු වෙතවා). Though his interview revealed many unsavory aspects of university life, in our opinion, the interview created a positive image of the universities as institutions on their way to becoming safer places for students and being more open to the public.

In contrast, it is concerning that the acting Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura has given a counter interview where he misrepresents the statements made by the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ruhuna to say that a certain Vice-Chancellor has claimed that 'all women students are raped', then he goes on to label him as being of an 'unsound and distorted mind'. The media company, of course, takes that misstatement to label the video with the title 'Ruhuna VC is crazy (රුහුණ VC පිස්සු)'.
පිස්සු'.

University leaders may have different opinions about the extent to which internal problems of universities should or should not be shared with the public, but it is unacceptable that an acting Vice-Chancellor insults a Vice-Chancellor who has shown remarkable leadership in eliminating ragging and violence.

We urge the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Directors of public universities to come together in eliminating ragging & all forms of violence, and to encourage and protect leaders who are committed to such.



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