



**International
Federation
of Journalists**

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Journalist Iqbal Athas attacked by government ministry

The International Federation (IFJ) is concerned for the safety of one of Sri Lanka's top investigative journalists after an attack posted on a ministry website.

Iqbal Athas, Associate Editor and Defense Correspondent for *The Sunday Times* in Colombo, has been attacked by the Sri Lankan government due to his criticism of government corruption and military expenditure.

On October 2 an article published on the Ministry of Defense website claimed; "Mr. Athas' recent work raises doubts whether he has been assisting in the psychological operations of the LTTE terrorists."

It also states, "Whoever attempts to reduce public support to the security forces or attempts to damage the loyalty of the soldiers towards their commanders at this moment can only be considered as those who serve the cause of the terrorists." The article can be read in full at http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20071001_06

IFJ Asia-Pacific director Jacqui Park said the ongoing persecution of Athas for carrying out his professional duties is disturbing and unjust.

"This is not the first time Athas has been targeted and it's disturbing that a government ministry still insists on slandering his name, despite government claims that they support a free media," said Park.

Athas is a respected journalist in Sri Lanka and internationally, having worked for several media outlets including CNN, *Jane's Defense Weekly*, and *The Times* of London. In late September 2007, Athas's security was withdrawn and a hate campaign was launched against him by senior government figures, after writing an investigative report on a multi-million dollar MiG-27 attack aircraft purchase involving government officials.

"The attacks against Athas reveal the Sri Lankan government is full of contradictions and has failed to show a clear and honest commitment to media freedom," Park said.

"While the government has a right to disagree with the claims made by journalists, they have no right to provoke hatred and harm reputations."

The IFJ supports its affiliate the Free Media Movement (FMM) in calling upon the Government to meaningfully strengthen media freedom and undertake impartial and thorough investigations into corrupt practices as a measure of its commitment to democratic governance in Sri Lanka.

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The IFJ represents over 500,000 journalists in more than 115 countries