

## The Friday Forum

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### MEDIA RELEASE

16<sup>th</sup> December 2014

### **Minister S.B.Dissanayake should make a public apology and resign**

On 12 December 2014 Minister of Higher Education, S.B. Dissanayake said on Sirisa TV, that the former President of Sri Lanka, Chandrika Kumaratunga should be “put down on the ground, trampled, stripped naked and made to run along the streets”. This is a terrible statement to come from any individual, but that a Minister of Higher Education, a supposed role model for young people, felt it was even remotely appropriate for him to make such a statement, is truly appalling. In many other countries, he would have been forced to resign or have been dismissed the very next day. At the very least he would have been asked to apologise. None of this was forthcoming, pointing to the culture of violence and hate speech having been so normalized in Sri Lanka that both government and public seem to tolerate it with little or no dissent.

As election fever for the presidential election mounts, there is a lot of talk about institutional change, better economics and a fight against corruption. What is also needed is a drastic change in our political culture. Viciousness and vitriol existed previously but were confined to the periphery of political space. Editors did their job and printed news that “was fit to print”. Today this government, more than any other, has given vitriol and hate speech centre place, whether in its newspapers, radio or TV. Horrendous things are written and said about individuals in the Daily News, SLBC or ITN. We have become accustomed to the crudeness of the so called “attack dogs” of the government, whether they be Ministers, members of Parliament, editors of newspapers, journalists or supportive intellectuals, so much so that we read them with amusement or turn the page. Some people, however, sadly take them seriously. The purpose of this privileged place being given to vitriol is to make individuals the target of hate and thereby to intimidate them, either to keep silent, stop their work or go abroad. To a great extent the government has succeeded in “chilling” speech and action because of the viciousness and vitriol.

The words of the Minister of Higher Education are part of this strategy. He feels no shame in saying such things in a country that once extolled “lajja” as one of the highest virtues, and he thinks that they are acceptable words to be broadcast to the people of our country on public TV. That such crude words of violence against women, advocating forced nudity - which in situations of armed conflict is an international war crime - should come publicly from any human being, let alone a Minister of Higher Education, truly beggars belief.

Minister Dissanayake should resign forthwith, making a public apology to Chandrika Kumaratunga and to the country. The Attorney General should look into the possibility of taking legal action against him.



Jayantha Dhanapala

Professor Arjuna Aluwihare

On behalf of Friday Forum, the Group of Concerned Citizens

Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala, Professor Arjuna Aluwihare, Professor Savitri Goonesekere, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Ms. Suriya Wickremasinghe, Mr. Priyantha Gamage, Rev. Dr. Jayasiri Peiris, Mr. Tissa Jayatilaka, Dr. Deepika Udagama, Ms. Damaris Wickremesekera, Professor Gameela Samarasinghe, Dr. Selvy Thiruchandran, Dr A.C.Visvalingam, Mr. Pulasthi Hewamanna, Professor Camena Guneratne, Ms. Manouri Muttetuwegama, Dr. G. Usvatte-Arrachchi, Dr.Upatissa Pethiyagoda, Mr. Ahilan Kadirgamar, Ms. Shanthi Dias, Mr. J.C. Weliamuna, Mr. Danesh Casie Chetty , Mr. Javid Yusuf, Rt. Reverend Duleep de Chickera, Professor Ranjini Obeyesekere, Dr. Jayampathy Wickramaratne ,

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