

MEDIA STATEMENT

We refer to *The Island* front page story of July 30 (Monday) under the heading "Govt. won't introduce 'Right to Information Act' at the expense of national security" wherein the newly appointed Secretary to the Minister of Mass Media and Information Charitha Herath is quoted as saying that the Government will not be introducing a Right to Information Act because it would compromise the country's national security.

The Secretary has stated that despite the conclusion of the (armed) conflict in May 2009, the Government couldn't share 'everything' clearly referring to matters relating to national security. He has further stated that 'external elements' can make use of this Act to obtain 'sensitive information'.

He was answering questions raised at a SAARC Media Internship programme for journalists and media officials in Colombo. Visiting journalists had asked him why Sri Lanka does not have an RTI (Right to Information Act) when other SAARC countries do.

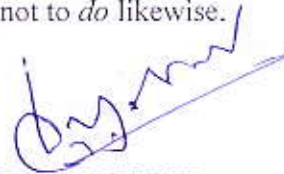
We are both, shocked and alarmed that a public servant holding such a responsible position as Mr. Herath does, should make such an elementary blunder.

Even a cursory glance at the proposed RTI legislation for Sri Lanka approved by the Cabinet in 2004, later revised and re-drafted by the Ministry of Justice and proposed by the Law Commission as well as existing legislation all over the world would show that it specifically excludes all matters relating to national security and 'sensitive information' the Ministry Secretary refers to from such a law. That is a basic aspect of RTI legislation.

We therefore reiterate our call to the Government to introduce RTI legislation in Sri Lanka without trotting out lame excuses and 'red herrings'. Over 100 democratic countries around the world, including most of South Asia, have empowered their citizens with such legislation and we see no reason for this Government not to *do* likewise.



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