

Online meeting: Release young Sri Lankan poet, Ahnaf Jazeem, detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act!

Action Committee for the Defence of Freedom of Art and Expression (Sri Lanka)
8 July 2021

The Action Committee for the Defence of Freedom of Art and Expression (ACDAE) in Sri Lanka will hold an online public meeting at 7 p.m. on Sunday July 18, as part of the campaign to release Ahnaf Jazeem. The 26-year-old poet has been arbitrarily detained for more than a year, under Sri Lanka's draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA).

The Sri Lankan police have failed to even file formal charges against Ahnaf. The Terrorism and Investigation Division (TID) has falsely accused him of "teaching racism and extremism to students and publishing books on it."

Ahnaf's poetry collection, *Navarasam* (Nine Moods), upon which the TID's allegations are based, was published in 2017. It has not been banned by any court. The book, in fact, denounces ISIS and advocates peace, social unity and anti-racism.

Ahnaf's arrest and detention is an attack on the democratic right to freedom of art and expression. It is also part of a virulent anti-Muslim campaign, as well as communal provocations against the country's Tamil minority. This has been encouraged by President Gotabhaya Rajapakse government and is aimed at dividing the working class as it increasingly enters into struggle.

In an intensification of this anti-Muslim campaign, the government provoked the arrest of human rights activist and lawyer Hejaaz Hizbullah, along with several Muslim politicians. These arrests have been arbitrarily linked to the April 2019 Easter Sunday terrorist attack, perpetrated by an Islamic fundamentalist group, with the support of ISIS.

The government's actions are part of a broader assault on the democratic rights of the working class

and other layers of the population. In recent months, police have intimidated and cracked down on journalists and social media.

These attacks are taking place as the Rajapakse government seeks to rapidly entrench a presidential dictatorship, backed by the military and Sinhala racist groups, amid a political and social crisis that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ahnaf's release cannot be achieved through appeals to the government. On the contrary, the ACDAE meeting will discuss a program of broad political struggle by workers in Sri Lanka and around the world, rallying all those who value democratic rights on the basis of the perspective of international socialism.

We urge workers, young people, students and artists to actively participate in this meeting, to join the ACDAE and to establish branches across the country that will join the struggle for democratic rights. Register for the meeting here.



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