



Ressort: Politik

Swiss embassy worker arrested in Sri Lanka

Bern, 17.12.2019 [ENA]

An employee of the Swiss Embassy in Sri Lanka has been arrested on charges of “fabricating evidence” relating to a kidnapping incident some weeks ago. The FDFA is concerned about this development and calls on the Sri Lankan authorities to comply with national law and international standards.

On 25 November 2019, the local employee of the Swiss Embassy reported that she had been abducted in Colombo to force her to disclose embassy-related information. Both the victim and the Swiss embassy cooperated fully with the Sri Lankan authorities during the proceedings. The FDFA has repeatedly called for due process to be followed. In particular, the FDFA has criticised the 30-hour interrogation to which the employee was subjected over three days despite being in poor health and the public statements by senior Sri Lankan officials questioning her account before the investigations had been completed.

The woman, a Sri Lankan national, claims to have been held on the street for a few hours on November 25 and threatened by unidentified men looking for “embassy-related information”.

The incident, described by the Swiss embassy as an “unacceptable attack”, happened one day after a senior Sri Lankan police officer, who had been investigating several cases involving the entourage of president Gotabaya Rajapaksa, had arrived in Switzerland to apply for asylum.

The Rajapaksa government has since ordered airport immigration authorities to block any police officers seeking to leave the country without permission.

Following the arrest of its employee, the FDFA expects the Sri Lankan law enforcement authorities to comply with national law and international judicial standards and to ensure that the employee's rights are now better protected. As an employer, the FDFA calls on the Sri Lankan authorities to meet their obligations under applicable law and give due consideration to the employee's poor state of health. Switzerland wishes to emphasise that in this high-profile case Sri Lanka's reputation as a country that upholds the rule of law is at stake. The FDFA and the Swiss Embassy in Colombo will continue to support their employee as far as possible.

The incident quickly escalated into a diplomatic spat between the two countries.

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Sri Lanka questioned the employee's version of event external link, citing technical evidence, including Uber records, CCTV footage, telephone records and GPS data.

In response, Swiss authorities summoned the Sri Lankan ambassador to Switzerland on December 2 and demanded an explanation of this evidence.

Last week, a judge in Colombo ordered the woman be examined by a court-approved doctor and forced her to stay in Sri Lanka for the purposes of the investigation. According to the Swiss embassy, the employee was not medically fit to talk about what happened to her.

The FDFA has reiterated to the Sri Lankan authorities that it is seeking a common and constructive way forward to resolve the security incident. On 16 December 2019, the Swiss ambassador in Colombo emphasised this again in a face-to-face meeting with Sri Lanka's President Gotabaya Rajapakse.

The Swiss Keystone-SDA news agency said on Monday that it was not yet clear if the woman had been formally charged. It quoted the DailyMirror online, a Sri Lankan newspaper, as reporting that she will be held in custody until December 30.

The FDFA and the Swiss Embassy in Colombo will continue to meet their responsibilities as an employer and do everything in their power to assist the member of staff concerned. (SOURCE:FDFA, SWISSINFO, KEYSTONE-SDA)

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