

Commissioner General of Prisons
Mr. H.M.T.N Upuldeniya
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Dear Mr. Upuldeniya

I'm writing to express my grave concern for the life of detained former Director of the Criminal Investigations Department, Gnendra Shani Abeysekara, who has recently tested positive for COVID-19 while in your custody. It is distressing to learn that he was transferred to the Gallella military-run treatment facility against his will, without informing his family of his situation or whereabouts. I am worried that he is not receiving the care he requires, given his medical history.

Already suffering from several serious health issues, including severe diabetes and heart disease, Mr. Abeysekara's vulnerability to the health risks of COVID-19 is heightened. Latest reports suggest that he is being transferred to the Infectious Diseases Hospital on 27 November. If not done so already, he must be immediately given access to medical care at a hospital. I am further concerned for his safety, as his family believes he is being targeted for exposing human rights violations implicating top politicians. This issue is only compounded by the fact that his family and independent human rights observers have been denied access to him. I urge you to provide access to independent observers, such as the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, so that they may assess Mr Abeysekara's condition.

Failing to provide adequate medical care to prisoners is a violation of Sri Lanka's international human rights obligations. As a state party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Sri Lanka is legally obliged to respect, promote, protect and fulfil "the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health." Adequate healthcare and safety of prisoners must be guaranteed at all times.

I urge you to ensure that Shani Abeysekara is granted prompt, regular and quality access to medical care at a hospital with best treatment, and that he is given unrestricted access to his family members and independent monitors regularly. If contact visits are restricted due to COVID-19 preventive measures, they must be replaced with other means of contact, for example, by phone, emails or video calls.

Yours sincerely,