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Women and Media Collective

**Statement by the Women and Media Collective on the attacks against the peaceful
GotaGoGama protest**

May 2022

The Women and Media Collective strongly condemns the attacks against the peaceful GotaGoGama protest and struggle site at the Galle Face Green on the 9th of May 2022.

This site of protest and struggle was established and occupied peacefully from the 9th of April by citizens protesting against a crisis resulting from severe economic mismanagement, rampant corruption and callous disregard for economic hardship reflected in daily shortages of essential food, medicines, fuel and ongoing power cuts amidst rising inflation, currency devaluation and escalating prices.

The level of despair and frustration in economic and political mismanagement led to the call for the resignation of the President and government for accountability. However, the right to peaceful assembly, expression and protest was completely violated as the protest site at Galle Face was destroyed on the morning of the 9th and protestors attacked by a mob of thousands bussed in at State expense, at the instigation of the Prime Minister and with State protection. Several protesters were injured and hospitalized, and the tents set up at the site destroyed. A simultaneous attack was also launched on peaceful protestors who were occupying a protest site outside Temple Trees.

These insidious attacks resulted in a mood of fear adding to months long frustrations and provoked retaliatory attacks and a break down in law and order despite the imposition of a curfew later in the day. The ongoing Emergency rather than curb anger, only exacerbated it as outraged citizens fought back to protect their right to freedom of assembly and expression. We welcome their resilience as the Galle Face protest site was re-built and the spirit of struggle and resistance carries on peacefully. However, the State condoned unprovoked violence has unfortunately led to a mood of anger and precipitated violence and arson in many other places in the country.

We are gravely concerned by this added crisis in the breakdown of law and order that can only exacerbate economic hardships. We call for an immediate and impartial investigation into the violence and the speedy arrest of perpetrators and those who helped organise the violence. We also call on all citizens to exercise calm and desist from retaliatory violence.

We make an urgent plea to those in positions of moral authority to help de-escalate the violence and we ask that Parliament takes firms steps to address the causes of Sri Lanka's ongoing crises with a realistic workable plan that will re-establish political stability and lead the way to economic recovery in the absence of a government and the resignation of the Prime Minister.

We are also concerned by the President's decision to enact a state of emergency during this extremely volatile time. The regulations imposed allow for the state to make arbitrary arrests that could lead to greater violation of human rights.

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சரசவி லேன், காசல் வீதி, கொழும்பு 8, இலங்கை.
Sarasavi Lane, Castle Street, Colombo 8, Sri Lanka

We reiterate our right to peaceful protest and assembly and call for these rights to be respected and protected as we call for investigation and accountability for the brutal attacks and a realistic and workable solution to the prevailing crisis, including the immediate reconvening of Parliament, and the reconstitution of government so that we are provided with relief to deal with the immediate hardships facing the country today. We ask that there is a continuous show of solidarity among the people as we together must make it a priority to overcome these challenges.