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Sri Lanka: Human rights organizations urge visiting Tamil Tiger delegation to end killings & recruitment of child soldiers

Press release from ICJ, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International

At a meeting with a senior Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) delegation visiting Geneva, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) called on the LTTE to end political killings and the recruitment of child soldiers and demonstrate how they will respect international humanitarian and human rights law in Sri Lanka.

The LTTE delegation, headed by S.P. Thamilselvan, leader of their political wing, is visiting several European countries to consider the Tamil Tigers' next steps in the stalled Sri Lankan peace process. International human rights organizations met with the LTTE delegation on Tuesday 5 October.

"We appealed to the senior LTTE leaders to show the world that they are both willing and capable of respecting the lives and rights of all Sri Lankans," said Nicholas Howen, Secretary-General of the ICJ. "We look to them to make a clear public commitment to international humanitarian and human rights standards and practical ways of putting them into effect," he added.

"At a time when we should be moving back to peace talks the LTTE seems to have dramatically escalated the killing of perceived Tamil opponents and is still recruiting child soldiers," said Loubna Freih, Geneva Director for Human Rights Watch.

Victims of killings have included activists from Tamil political parties not aligned with the LTTE, members of a rival LTTE faction in the east, and alleged Sri Lankan military informants.

"This climate of fear, especially in the east, will make it even more difficult to find a lasting peace in the country," warned Peter Splinter, Geneva Representative for Amnesty International.

S.P. Thamilselvan said in the meeting with human rights organisations that the LTTE denies responsibility for such killings but that the LTTE would consider the development of confidence building measures to end killings that are threatening the peace process.

In the last two weeks reported killings have included: Valli Suntharam, a 61-year-old trade

union activist and member of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), shot dead in Jaffna on 27 September; Selvarajah Mohan, a 22-year-old Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) supporter, stabbed to death after being taken from his home in Jaffna district on 24 September; Rajadurai Sivagnanam, killed in Batticaloa district on 22 September; and Somasundaram Varunakulasingham, a central committee member of the EPDP, shot dead in Colombo on 23 September.

Recruitment of child soldiers also continues. UNICEF has documented that in May, June and July 2004 alone, the LTTE recruited 259 children, while releasing 106 -- and UNICEF acknowledges that they learn about only a small proportion of child recruitment.

The human rights organizations also met with members of the Northeast Secretariat on Human Rights, set up in July with the support of the LTTE. "Such human rights initiatives could be positive if they help to prevent serious human rights violations and give ordinary people a way of seeking protection and remedies," said Nicholas Howen. "We urge the LTTE to affirm publicly that they will cooperate fully with this Secretariat. The international community should assist any genuine moves towards a culture of respect for rights and the need for this new Secretariat to be independent and professional," added Nicholas Howen.

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