

PUBLIC

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14 May 2009

UA126/09 Enforced Disappearance
SRI LANKA Stephen Sunthararaj (m), Human Rights Defender

On 7 May, Stephen Sunthararaj was abducted by five men dressed in military uniform and carrying pistols whilst travelling in his lawyer's car in the Sri Lankan capital, Colombo. Stephen Sunthararaj had been released without charge from police custody a few hours before he was abducted and he has not been heard from since. Amnesty International fears that Stephen Sunthararaj has been subjected to enforced disappearance because of his work as a Project Manager at the Centre for Human Rights and Development in Colombo.

Stephen Sunthararaj was arrested near his office on 12 February, in Colombo by a group of Army officers and then transferred into police custody. He was held without charge until 7 May, when he was released without being charged as there was no evidence implicating him in any offence. At the time of his abduction Stephen Sunthararaj was travelling in his lawyer's car with his wife and two children when two men on motorcycles pulled in front of the car to stop it. As the car stopped a white van pulled up next to it and five men dressed in military uniforms and carrying pistols emerged, dragged Stephen Sunthararaj from his car, and forced him into the white van. One of men removed the keys from the car that Stephen Sunthararaj and his family was travelling in and fled from the scene in the van.

Police Officers from the Cinnamon Garden police station in Colombo took the vehicle and passengers to the station where they took statements from Stephen Sunthararaj's wife and lawyer. No investigation has been initiated.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In June 2008 the UN Human Rights Council's Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) expressed concern about the high numbers of recent cases of enforced disappearances reported from Sri Lanka. WGEID received 212 reports of disappearances in 2008 and expressed concern that many more may be going unreported because of a fear of reprisals. The Sri Lankan authorities continued to deny the scale of reports of enforced disappearances and have failed to initiate independent investigations.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Sinhalese, Tamil or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Stephen Sunthararaj who was abducted by men in military uniforms on 7 May;
- calling on the Sri Lankan authorities to order an immediate and impartial investigation into his abduction in order to establish his whereabouts and bring all those responsible to justice;
- urging the authorities to ensure that human rights defenders are able to continue their legitimate work without fear of harassment or intimidation.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency the President Mahinda Rajapaksa
Presidential Secretariat
Colombo 1
Sri Lanka

Fax: +94 11 2446657
Salutation: Your Excellency

Hon. Sarath N. Silva
Chief Justice
Supreme Court of Sri Lanka
Superior Courts Complex
Colombo 12
Sri Lanka

Fax: +94 11 2435446
Salutation: Dear Chief Justice

Gotabhaya Rajapaksa
Ministry of Defence
Ministry of Defence, Public Security, Law and Order
15/5, Bauddhaloka Mawatha,
Colombo 03,
Sri Lanka

Fax: +94 11 254 1529
Salutation: Dear Minister

Jayantha Wickramaratne
Inspector General of Police
Sri Lanka Police
Headquarters
101/1 Kew Road
Colombo 2
Sri Lanka

Fax: + 94 11 244 6174
Salutation: Dear Inspector General

COPIES TO:

and to diplomatic representatives of Sri Lanka accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 25 June.