

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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This is a limited action - please organize up to 20 appeals per section

UA 398/92

**Fear of "disappearance"/
unacknowledged detention**

17 December 1992

SRI LANKA:

Vishwanathan Pathmanathan, aged 38, shop owner

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Vishwanathan Pathmanathan who was arrested on 24 November 1992 but whose detention has not been acknowledged by the authorities. Vishwanathan Pathmanathan was taken away by army personnel while attending a memorial ceremony for his aunt and was put on a bus going from Batticaloa to Valaichenai. He was taken off the bus at the Kommathurai Army Camp and was seen being taken into the camp at around 4pm.

When relatives tried to make inquiries at the army camp on 24 November, they were chased away. When they went back the next day, they were told that Vishwanathan Pathmanathan had been transferred to Batticaloa. A fellow-prisoner, who has since been released, has testified that he last saw Vishwanathan Pathmanathan in detention at Kommathurai army camp on 25 November 1992. He said he saw Vishwanathan Pathmanathan being put in a lorry by soldiers and driven away. When relatives made inquiries at Batticaloa prison camp, they were told there was no such person detained there.

Relatives have made appeals to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Human Rights Task Force (HRTF) offices at Batticaloa. They also have also made enquiries with the Commanding Officer of the Army at Batticaloa but to date have not received a response.

According to the relatives, Vishwanathan Pathmanathan may have been arrested at the instigation of a person who works closely with the army in Kommathurai and who had tried to extort money from him. This person had been present at the time of his arrest.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Although reports of "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions during 1992 have been significantly fewer than in previous years, these grave violations continue at a high rate, particularly in Batticaloa District.

During a recent Amnesty International mission to Sri Lanka, senior military officers admitted that the army holds certain prisoners in unacknowledged detention for periods varying from a few days to a few weeks, with no written record of the arrest during this time, and hidden from the ICRC.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters either in English or in your own language:

- expressing concern about the arrest and subsequent "disappearance" of Vishwanathan Pathmanathan;

- urging that an immediate investigation be conducted into his "disappearance" to determine his place of detention;

- seeking assurances that if he is in custody, he be humanely treated and granted immediate and regular access to relatives and a lawyer.

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APPEALS TO

1) His Excellency President Ranasinghe Premadasa
Presidential Secretariat
Republic Square
Colombo 1, Sri Lanka
Telegrams: President Premadasa, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Telexes: 22650 PRESEC CE
Faxes: + 94 1 44 6657

Salutation: Dear President

2) The Hon D B Wijetunga
Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence
Ministry of Defence
Republic Square
Colombo 2, Sri Lanka
Telegrams: Prime Minister, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Telexes: 22229 MINDEF CE
Faxes: + 94 1 44 6091

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

3) Lieutenant General Cecil Waidyaratne
Commander in Chief of the Army
Flower Road
Colombo 7, Sri Lanka
Telegrams: Commander-in-Chief C. Waidyaratne, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Telexes: 22496 AYCMDC SL

Salutation: Dear Lieutenant General

4) Justice J F A Soza
Human Rights Task Force
75, Norris Canal Road
Colombo 10, Sri Lanka

Salutation: Dear Justice Soza

5) Justice H A G de Silva
Chairperson
Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Involuntary Removal of Persons
Room No. 2-115, BMICH

Bauddhaloka Mawatha
Colombo 7, Sri Lanka

Salutation: Dear Justice de Silva

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO: diplomatic representatives of Sri Lanka in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 28 January 1993.