

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 37/019/2008

15 May 2008

Further Information on UA 88/08 (ASA 37/016/2008, 4 April 2008) - Arbitrary detention

SRI LANKA

Jayaprakash Sittampalam Tissainayagam (m), journalist

Journalist Jayaprakash Sittampalam (J. S.) Tissainayagam was granted access to an eye specialist on 9 May. The specialist has said that his condition needs monitoring and he needs new glasses because the conditions of his eyes have changed. The specialist needs to see him again in a month to reassess his condition. J. S. Tissainayagam was also granted access to his lawyer on 14 May, for the first time since 21 March.

J. S. Tissainayagam however remains in Terrorist Investigation Division (TID) detention in Colombo, where he is being held without charge. He was supposed to be brought before a court on 12 May, in compliance with the Sri Lankan Emergency Regulations which require detainees to be brought in front of a court once a month. However this was postponed with no reason being given and the magistrate reportedly stated that he should be produced in court on 14 May. He was not brought to court on that day and the magistrate reportedly ordered that he appear in court on 23 May.

Amnesty International also understands that there is little ventilation in the cell where J. S. Tissainayagam is being detained due to the air conditioning breaking down, so detention conditions are extremely uncomfortable due to the heat.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International is alarmed by a number of recent attacks and other violations of the human rights of media workers, which follow the pattern outlined in its recent report 'Sri Lanka: Silencing Dissent' (ASA 37/001/2008, 7 February 2008). Journalists and other media workers have been detained for long periods of time without charge on previous occasions. On 21 November 2006, Parameshwari Munusamy, a Tamil woman journalist with the Sinhalese newspaper Mawbima, was arrested by Special Task Force (STF) personnel and detained at TID headquarters under the Emergency Regulations on suspicion of having links with the LTTE. At the time of her arrest, she was not told details of the grounds and legal basis she was held under. Detained without charge for four months, she was released on 22 March 2007. Her family were also reportedly assaulted at their home on 14 March 2008, by intruders who forcibly entered their home, causing serious injuries to her father and sister. There have been a number of attacks and arbitrary arrests of media workers in the last few weeks including Gayan Lasantha Ranga, Udayen and Kithsiri Wijesinghe, all contributors to the website www.outreachsl.com. The three were reportedly released on 18 March after being held in TID detention without charge for a number of days.

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

- welcoming reports that J. S. Tissainayagam was granted access to an eye specialist on 9 May and access to his lawyer on 14 May;
- expressing concern that J. S. Tissainayagam is being detained without charge by the Terrorist Investigation Division (TID) in Colombo, apparently to prevent him from peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression through his media work;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that J.S. Tissainayagam is not tortured or ill-treated, and that he is allowed unrestricted access to his family, a lawyer of his choice, an independent court and any specialist medical treatment he may require;
- urging the authorities to release J. S. Tissainayagam immediately and unconditionally, unless he is to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and remanded by an independent court;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that there is sufficient ventilation in the cell where he is being detained.

APPEALS TO:

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

Fax: + 94 11 2446657

Salutation: Your Excellency

Hon. Amarasiri Dodangoda
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice and Law Reforms
Superior Courts Complex,
Colombo 12
Sri Lanka

Fax: + 94 11 2445447

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES 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 26 June 2008.