

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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PLEASE SEND UP TO TEN APPEALS PER SECTION

UA 375/91 "Disappearance"/Unacknowledged detention

6 November 1991

SRI LANKA Subramaniam Ketheeswaran

Amnesty International is concerned about the possible "disappearance" of Subramaniam Ketheeswaran, a 24-year-old student. He was arrested from the premises of the Manikkar Pullaiyar Kovil refugee camp in Bambalapitiya, Colombo, on 25 September 1991.

According to an eye-witness report, he was taken by a group of men into the office on the camp premises at about 5pm. At some time around 7.30pm he was brought back out. He was blindfolded, had his hands tied behind his back and was put into a green jeep and taken away. There were no officials of the Department of Social Services, who run the refugee camp, present at the time of the arrest. Relatives asked members of the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), who were stationed in the camp, for information about Subramaniam Ketheeswaran's whereabouts and were told to go to the EPDP main office outside the camp.

The EPDP is one of several Tamil groups, opposed to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who work alongside the Sri Lanka army helping to identify and hand over LTTE suspects to the security forces in Colombo. They have been delegated official responsibilities in certain refugee camps.

Relatives went to the EPDP office several times but did not receive any satisfactory reply as to Subramaniam Ketheeswaran's whereabouts. On one occasion an EPDP official reportedly told a relative that he had been taken away by members of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO - another group who oppose the LTTE and support the security forces) and had been taken to an army camp in Batticaloa.

Subramaniam Ketheeswaran and his mother were formerly residents of Arampattu, Batticaloa, in eastern Sri Lanka. They had taken refuge in Colombo in January 1991 in order to escape the continuing conflict in the east of the country. At the time of his arrest, Subramaniam Ketheeswaran had been working as a security guard in a private firm in Bambalapitiya, Colombo. He has been suffering from heart disease for the last five years and there are fears for his health since his arrest.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since the outbreak of the fighting between the Sri Lankan security forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in June 1990, over 3,000 Tamil people are reported to have "disappeared" in the custody of government forces in the east. Many people in refugee camps have been rounded up by the army during cordon and search operations and have

subsequently "disappeared". Many Tamil people have fled the area and have gone to Colombo to seek refuge.

In Colombo, security forces regularly arrest young Tamils and question them about their presence in the capital. Those suspected of involvement with the LTTE are taken into custody. Tamil armed groups such as the EPDP, TELO and People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) assist the security forces in these operations and sometimes carry out arrests independently. Since June 1990, several of those taken into custody in this way subsequently "disappeared".

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RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern about the reported arrest and subsequent "disappearance" of Subramaniam Ketheeswaran;
- 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.

APPEALS TO

1) His Excellency President R Premadasa
Presidential Secretariat
Republic Square, Colombo 1
Sri Lanka

Dear President

Telegrams: President Premadasa, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Telexes: 22650 PRESEC CE
Faxes: + 94 1 54 6657

2) The Hon D.B. Wijetunga
Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence
Office of the Prime Minister
58 Sir Ernest de Silva Mawatha
Colombo 7, Sri Lanka

Dear Minister

Telegrams: Prime Minister, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Telexes: 22229 MINDEF CE
Faxes: + 94 1 54 6091

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

Dear Justice Soza

4) Justice H A G de Silva
Chairperson
Presidential Commission of Inquiry
into Involuntary Removal of Persons

Dear Justice de Silva

Room No 2-115, Bandaranaike Memorial
International Conference Hall
Bauddhaloka Mawatha
Colombo 7, Sri Lanka

COPIES 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 18 December 1991.