

PUBLIC

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Possible abduction

SRI LANKA

Sebastian Goodfellow (m), aged 32, ethnic Tamil

A driver for an aid agency, Sebastian Goodfellow, has not been seen since 15 May, and it is feared he has been abducted, possibly by an armed group operating with the tacit support of the security forces.

He works for the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), a humanitarian NGO which provides assistance and protection to refugees and internally displaced people. According to the NRC he finished work at their office in the capital, Colombo, on 15 May a little after 7.30pm. He called his wife on his mobile phone at about 8.30pm, but he did not say where he was. No one has been able to contact him since then. When his wife has called his mobile phone, people speaking Tamil have answered, saying that her husband has "gone abroad" or "gone to Germany." His colleagues at the NRC say that Sebastian Goodfellow is normally very reliable and it is most unlike him to be out of contact. The security forces maintain checkpoints throughout Colombo.

The NRC have reported his possible abduction at the Cinnamon Gardens police station in Colombo and his family have reported the same to the police in the eastern city of Batticaloa, where he is normally based. The police have not yet obtained the necessary data from the telephone company to attempt to locate the position of Sebastian's mobile phone.

The NRC and his family cannot suggest any credible reason why he would have been abducted. The fact that he worked for an NGO may have put him at risk, as NGOs have drawn attention to the impact on civilians of the ongoing conflict between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (otherwise known as the Tamil Tigers).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Humanitarian workers have been targeted during the conflict that has continued for over 20 years between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. At least 37 humanitarian workers have been unlawfully killed since the beginning of 2006. The deliberate targeting of humanitarian workers is a serious violation of the basic principles of international human rights and humanitarian law. During an August 2007 visit, UN Under-Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief John Holmes described Sri Lanka as "one of the most dangerous places for aid workers in the world." Despite the large number of targeted attacks on humanitarian workers, the authorities have conducted no successful independent investigations into the killings that have happened since 2007, following an increase in fighting between the government and the LTTE in 2006.

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

- expressing concern that humanitarian NGO worker Sebastian Goodfellow has not been seen or heard from since 15 May;
- urging the authorities to order a prompt, independent and impartial investigation into the possible abduction of Sebastian Goodfellow, to make the findings public and bring those responsible to justice;
- if Sebastian Goodfellow is found to be in the custody of the security forces, calling on the authorities to release him immediately and unconditionally unless he is to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence;

- calling on the authorities to ensure that Sebastian Goodfellow is not tortured or ill-treated, and is allowed unrestricted access to his family, a lawyer of his choice and any medical treatment he may require.

APPEALS TO: (Please note that fax numbers can be unreliable. Please keep trying)

President Mahinda Rajapaksa
Presidential Secretariat, Colombo 1, Sri Lanka

Fax: +94 11 2446657
+94 11 2472100

Salutation: Dear President Rajapaksa

Victor Perera
Inspector General of Police
Sri Lanka Police, Headquarters
101/1 Kew Road, Colombo 2
Sri Lanka

E-mail: igp@police.lk
police@police.lk

Salutation: Dear Inspector General

Mahinda Samarasinghe
Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights,
2, Wijerama Mawatha
Colombo 7, Sri Lanka

Fax: +9411 269 3284
+94 11 268 1980
+94 11 268-1985

E-mail: info@dmhr.gov.lk

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Gotabaya Rajapaksa
Secretary, Ministry of Defence
15/5 Baladaksha Mawatha, Colombo 3, Sri Lanka

Fax: +94 11 2446 300
+94 11 2541 529

Salutation: Dear Secretary of Defence

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 9 July 2008.