SRI LANKAVelupillai Tharmalingham
Ponnusamy Sivakumar known as "Raja"

The whereabouts of Velupillai Tharmalingham and Ponnusamy Sivakumar are unknown since they were arrested by the Sri Lanka army in separate incidents earlier this month in the Vavuniya area. Amnesty International is concerned for their safety.

Velupillai Tharmalingham left his house at 10am on 10 August 2000 to travel to the nearby village of Muruganoor on his motorbike. He was taken into custody after being questioned by soldiers at the Kovilkulam Aaladi Army Checkpoint. Several people witnessed his arrest. However when relatives later went to the checkpoint the army denied having arrested him. Further inquiries were made at 211 Brigade army camp nearby, and the Police Counter Subversive Unit on 15 August 2000, but they denied his arrest.

Ponnusamy Sivakumar, who is married with a one year old son, was eating his breakfast on 13 August 2000 when soldiers, conducting a search operation, came to his home at the Sasthri Koolankulam Welfare Centre, a camp for internally displaced people in Vavuniya. They asked for him by his nickname "Raja" and took him away with his hands tied behind his back.

Relatives of both men have reported their "disappearance" to the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

These cases, the seventh and eighth "disappearances" reported to Amnesty International this year, are taking place as the armed conflict between government troops and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who are fighting for an independent state in the north and east of the country, intensifies. Two days before the "disappearance" of Velupillai Tharmalingham the LTTE ambushed an army patrol vehicle near Vavuniya killing at least six soldiers.

The United Nations Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances visited Sri Lanka in October 1999 to see what progress the government had made in implementing recommendations the Working Group had made after previous visits in 1991 and 1992. It expressed concern that many of its recommendations to prevent "disappearances" had not been implemented.

There has been an increase in reports of torture, "disappearances" and deaths in custody since new emergency regulations were introduced by the President in May 2000. Amnesty International is concerned that wider powers given to the security forces under the new regulations and the removal of several earlier safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention may have contributed to the increase.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:
-express concern for the safety of Velupillai Tharmalingham and Ponnusamy Sivakumar who have not been seen since they were taken into custody by the army in Vavuniya on 10 August and 13 August respectively;
- urging that the authorities immediately provide information about their whereabouts and the reasons for their arrest;
- asking that if they are in detention they are promptly charged with a recognizable criminal offence, or are immediately released;
-urging that in the meantime steps are taken to guarantee their safety and allow them access to their family;

- urging that those responsible for their "disappearance" be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga
Presidential Residence, "Temple Trees", Colombo 3, SRI LANKA
Telegrams: President Kumaratunga, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Faxes: + 94 1 33 37 03
Salutation: Your Excellency

Army Commander
(Until 24 August:) Lt Gen Sri Lal Weerasooriya (who then retires & is replaced by:)
(From 24 August:)Lt Gen Lionel Balagalle
Army Commander, Army Headquarters, Colombo 1, SRI LANKA
Telegrams: Commander of the Army, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Salutation: Dear Army Commander

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 29 September 2000.