

**PUBLIC**

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**Extrajudicial Executions/Fear for safety**

**20 December 2000**

**SRI LANKA**

**Villagers of Gopalapuram**

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Naval personnel based in Nilaveli, Trincomalee district have threatened the villagers of Gopalapuram, in eastern Sri Lanka, after they protested when several people were killed, apparently by the navy. The young people of the village are in particular danger.

The bodies of two young men from the village were found in the morning of 14 December. Navy personnel reportedly told the Kuchchaveli police they had killed the two men, Mahalingam Thamiran and Shanmugarajah Sornahasana, and handed over the pair's identity cards. They claimed that both men were members of the armed opposition group Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which is fighting for an independent state in the north and east of Sri Lanka.

However, Amnesty International has been told that the men were detained by the navy on 13 December, at around 7.30pm. They had been returning home by motorbike, but had a flat tyre, and had been pushing the motorbike home. Villagers from nearby Iqbal Nagar allege that navy personnel took the men into an abandoned mill and tortured them. They say that around 10.45pm they heard cries for help, followed by gunfire.

The bodies were taken to Trincomalee hospital. They reportedly showed signs of torture. Villagers returning from their funeral on 16 December were reportedly stopped by navy personnel and told that if they continued to "go on like this", their own funerals would soon follow.

Four other villagers were killed on 22 November, apparently as they laid out their fishing nets in the nearby lagoon. One of them was a 15-year-old boy. A group of villagers from Gopalapuram organized a demonstration against the killings. It is believed that Mahalingam Thamiran and Shanmugarajah Sornahasana may have been killed because the navy knew they were among the demonstrators.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The navy was deployed to the Nilaveli area of Trincomalee district in 1999, when it took over responsibility for security in the area from the army.

There have been continuous reports of human rights violations by naval personnel in the area for some time.

Apart from the killings described above, navy personnel have also been implicated in indiscriminate killings, extrajudicial executions, "disappearances" and several incidents of torture and harassment of civilians.

To Amnesty International's knowledge, not a single navy officer has yet been arrested in connection with any of these incidents.

#### **RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:**

- expressing concern about the killing of Mahalingam Thamiran and Shanmugarajah Sornahasana, who were reportedly taken into custody by the navy at Iqbal Nagar in the evening of 13 December;
- urging that an independent and impartial investigation into their killing is set up immediately and that those responsible are brought to justice;
- expressing concern at reports that the navy has been responsible for other human rights violations in the area, and the authorities' failure to take action in response to these reports;
- expressing concern that other villagers of Gopalapuram are being threatened by the navy, especially for speaking out against human rights violations by navy personnel;

- urging that all necessary steps are taken to ensure the safety of the villagers of Gopalapuram.

**APPEALS TO:**

President

Her Excellency President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga  
Presidential Secretariat  
Colombo 1, Sri Lanka

**Telegrams:**                      **President Kumaratunga, Colombo, Sri Lanka**

**Faxes:**                      **+ 94 1 33 37 03**

**Salutation:**                      **Your Excellency**

Navy Commander

Cecil Tissera  
Navy Headquarters  
Flagstaff Street  
Colombo 1  
Sri Lanka

**Telegrams:**                      **Navy Commander, Colombo, Sri Lanka**

**Salutation:**                      **Dear 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 31 January 2001.