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"Disappearance"

11 October 1990

SRI LANKA:

Antony Bennet Pietersz

Antony Bennet Pietersz has reportedly "disappeared" after being detained by the Sri Lanka Army at Neelamunai, Batticaloa District, on 7 September 1990 at 9.30am. His relatives have inquired for him at the Neelamunai Army Camp, but were told that nobody of that name had been detained. They have searched for him at other camps in the area, but have not succeeded in tracing him.

At the time of his detention, Antony Bennet Pietersz was returning from Kalmunai, Batticaloa District, to his home at Koolavady Colony, Batticaloa. He was carrying provisions from Kalmunai to sell to traders in Batticaloa.

Antony Bennet Peitersz is a carpenter by profession, but was unable to continue in this work after hostilities broke out in June between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and government forces (see below).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

After the withdrawal of Indian troops from northeastern Sri Lanka in March 1990 the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), an armed separatist group, took effective control of the area. From April, Amnesty International began to receive reports of summary executions by the LTTE of political opponents and that they were holding prisoners in incommunicado detention. The organization called for an immediate halt to these abuses in May.

Fighting in northeastern Sri Lanka between Sri Lanka government forces and the LTTE broke out in June 1990 after the LTTE captured several police stations in the area and took prisoner hundreds of policemen who had surrendered to them, many of whom they murdered. Tamil policemen among them are believed to have been released. The LTTE had been negotiating with the Government of Sri Lanka about conditions under which fresh elections to the Northeastern Provincial Council could be held at the time of the renewal of hostilities.

Since then, government forces have regained control of certain areas of the northeast, but the LTTE remain in control of the Jaffna peninsula. Grave abuses have been reported from both sides: the LTTE have been accused of the murder of hundreds of Muslim and Sinhalese civilians in the east, including about 140 Muslims in a mosque at Kattankudy on Friday, 10 August 1990. In reprisal, armed Muslim groups, sometimes apparently operating with the support of government security forces, have reportedly attacked and killed numerous Tamil civilians in the area.

Government forces are believed to have been responsible for many hundreds of "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions of defenceless Tamil civilians, including many from the Batticaloa area. According to a foreign correspondent who recently visited Batticaloa, over 1,200 people had "disappeared" from Batticaloa town alone by the time of his visit, and the local prison held only six prisoners (Guardian, London, 9 October 1990).

Antony Bennet Pietersz is a member of the small Burgher community, descendants of Dutch or Portuguese settlers, which comprises less than one per cent of the total population of Sri Lanka.

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

- expressing concern at reports that Antony Bennet Pietersz has "disappeared" after being detained by the army at Neelamunai, Batticaloa District, on 7 September 1990;
- urging that a full, independent inquiry be immediately established to establish his fate or whereabouts;
- seeking assurances that if he is in detention, he is being humanely treated and that he will be granted immediate and regular access to relatives and lawyers;
- urging that he be immediately released if there are no criminal charges against him, or that he be brought to trial under ordinary procedures of law.

APPEALS TO

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

Telegrams: President Premadasa, Colombo, Sri Lanka
 Telexes: 22650 PRESEC CE

The Hon Ranjan Wijeratne
 Minister of Plantation Industries and Minister of State for Defence
 Ministry of Defence
 Colombo
 Sri Lanka

Telegrams: Minister Defence, Colombo, Sri Lanka
 Telexes: 22229 MINDEF CE

Lieutenant General Hamilton Wanasinghe
 Commander in Chief of the Army
 Flower Road
 Colombo 7
 Sri Lanka

Telegrams: Commander-in-Chief Wanasinghe, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Telexes: 22496 AYCMDC SL

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 22 November 1990.