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Human Rights Defenders from Sri Lanka and Burundi share 2007 Martin Ennals Award

Amnesty International, as one of the members on the Jury of the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders (MEA), announces that the 2007 Laureates are:

Rajan Hoole and Kopalasingham Sritharan, co-founders of the University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR), Jaffna, have monitored and documented in regular reports the human rights abuses committed by the Sri Lanka Government as well as the Tamil Tigers (LTTE). At great personal risk they have reported on the effects of armed conflict on children, women, minorities and displaced people over the past 18 years. Since the latest upsurge in fighting, the UTHR has conducted groundbreaking investigations into the most serious atrocities, including the Trinco 5 (2 January 2006), the Mullaitivu bombing that killed some 51 young women and girls (14 August 2006), and the execution-style slaying of 17 humanitarian aid workers in Muttur (5 August 2006). Often alone in exposing abuses by all parties, both men are under death sentences from the LTTE. Since the assassination of their colleague, Rajani Thiranagama, the two men have been forced to work underground for more than a decade, but their reports are well known in Sri Lanka and abroad.

Pierre Claver Mbonimpa served as a policeman in Burundi until December 1994. He spent two years in prison on the basis of false accusations. Upon his release, he founded non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to help protect the rights of prisoners, including the 9,000 prisoners that have been waiting for trial for years in the country's overcrowded jails. He has campaigned fearlessly against torture, and organized events where police and military representatives have had to face public questions from human rights activists and victims. When civil society members and journalists were arrested recently, he again spoke out despite the risks. In a fragile country, where civil war has claimed thousands of lives, Pierre Claver Mbonimpa is often hailed as the only person who stands up for the rights of Hutu, Tutsi and Batwa. He is outspoken about human rights violations, even in the public media.

The Chairman of the Jury of the MEA, Hans Thoolen, describes the laureates as "symbols of the human rights movement in their respective countries, where standing up for human rights and democracy is a dangerous activity". He draws attention to the laureates' principled stand to effectively cover abuses committed by both sides in the conflict. The eleven organizations on the Jury of the Martin Ennals Award call on the Governments of Sri Lanka and Burundi to ensure the safety of the Laureates and allow them to work without harassment. The Ceremony of the Martin Ennals Award will take place in Geneva in October.

MEA: the main award of the human rights movement. The Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders (MEA) is a unique collaboration among eleven of the world's leading human rights organizations to give protection to human rights defenders worldwide. The Jury is composed of the following NGOs: Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Human Rights First, International Federation for Human Rights, World Organization Against Torture, International Service for Human Rights, Front Line, International Commission of Jurists, Diakonie Germany, International Alert and Huridocs.

Previous laureates : Akbar Ganji, Iran and Arnold Tsunga, Zimbabwe (2006); Aktham Naisse, Syria; Lida Yusupova, Russia; Alirio Uribe Muñoz, Colombia; Jacqueline Moudeina, Chad; Peace Brigades International; Immaculee Birhaheka, DR Congo; Natasha Kandic, Yugoslavia; Eyad El Sarraj, Palestine; Samuel Ruiz, Mexico; Clement Nwankwo, Nigeria; Asma Jahangir, Pakistan; Harry Wu, China.

Patrons of the Martin Ennals Award: Asma Jahangir, Barbara Hendricks, Jose Ramos-Horta, Adama Dieng, Leandro Despouy, Robert Fulghum and Theo van Boven.

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