

UA 48/02

Fear for Safety/Child soldiers

14 February 2002

SRI LANKA

Duncy Mary (f), aged 15  
Sudharshini Tharmalingam (f), aged 12  
Gunasekaram Kananayagam (m), aged 16  
Kathiresan Ruban (m), aged 16  
Ravindran Sanjiv (m), aged 13  
Anantharasa Gunaseelan (m), aged 14  
Baba Thambirasa (m), aged 12  
Mahendran Kapilan (m), aged 16  
Mathuraiveeran Selvarasa (m), aged 15  
Thiyagarajah Suthaharan (m), aged 12  
Selvaraji Suthahar (m), aged 13  
Vellaisamy John (m), aged 13  
Selvarasa Vishaharan (m), aged 15

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Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of the children named above, who are thought to have been recruited as combatants by the armed political group, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Duncy Mary was last seen as she returned from a tuition class near a bus stand in Tannamunai, north of Batticaloa town, eastern Sri Lanka on 11 February. She is a Grade 9 student at St. Joseph school in Tannamunai, where she has reportedly excelled in sports. She is originally from Jaffna, northern Sri Lanka, but together with her family was displaced from there in 1995.

Kathiresan Ruban, Ravindran Sanjiv and Anantharasa Gunaseelan were reportedly among a group of seven boys who were recruited by the LTTE on 2 January at Chettikulam, Vavuniya district.

Thiyagarajah Suthaharan, Selvaraji Suthahar and Vellaisamy John told their parents on 10 December 2001 that they were going to play at the playground in Sivapuram, Vavuniya district, but they did not return home afterwards.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International's concern about the recruitment of the all the children named above, (apart from Duncy Mary who was recruited very recently) was conveyed in a communication to the LTTE leadership on 7 February. In its communication, Amnesty International gave details, including the date of birth, address and date of alleged recruitment of each of the children. It also expressed concern at reports of the continuing recruitment of children over the last few months, since the declaration of unilateral cease-fires by both the LTTE and the government on 24 December 2001. Both the LTTE and the government are currently negotiating the terms of a permanent cease-fire agreement and preparing for negotiations on a political settlement to the longstanding armed conflict, with the assistance of the government of Norway.

The LTTE's political advisor and chief negotiator on 6 February, was quoted on the *Tamilnet* website as stating that the LTTE is recruiting young men and women above seventeen years of age, "to expand the movement's political and administrative wings" as part of preparations for the political and administrative demands that will arise as the peace progress progresses. He also reportedly stated that the LTTE's military section was also recruiting volunteers "to ensure the prevailing balance of forces is not altered disadvantageously."

In another statement on 3 February, in response to reports of recruitment of children by the LTTE, Karikalan, the deputy leader of the political section of the LTTE was reported on *Tamilnet* as stating that "Although no one has complained recently to the ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross] or Sri Lanka's human rights commission, that we have forcefully conscripted anybody, it is still our wish to see that we are not maligned further by reports and rumours that our organisation is forcing youth to join".

Amnesty International takes no position on the recruitment of adults into the armed forces of governments or armed political groups. It does however, oppose the recruitment of children as combatants by governments and armed opposition groups alike, regardless of whether they have been conscripted by force or joined on a voluntary basis. It also opposes any form of recruitment, training or deployment of children under the age of 18, including for support roles such as messengers or porters.

The LTTE itself in May 1998 at the time of the visit to Sri Lanka of Olara Otunnu, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General for Children in Armed Conflict, had made a commitment not to recruit children under 17 years of age and not to deploy them in combat under 18 years.

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

- expressing concern about the recruitment of children as young as 12 by the LTTE (include details of some specific cases);
- urging that these children are returned to their families or communities at the earliest opportunity;
- urging the LTTE leadership to clarify in a public statement its current recruitment policy, so that children, parents and civil society in the north and east of Sri Lanka are fully informed;
- appealing that such a statement clarifies where and how complaints regarding recruitment can be lodged;
- calling for the monitoring of the human rights situation, including the recruitment of children, to be incorporated into the proposed permanent cease-fire agreement currently being negotiated between the government and the LTTE.

**APPEALS TO:**

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75020 Paris, France

**Fax: + 33 1 43 58 11 91**

**Salutation: Dear Dr Balasingam**

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64 Eaton Avenue  
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**Salutation: Dear Sir or Madam**

Tamil Co-ordinating Committee Norway  
Det tamilske Samordningsutvalget  
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**Fax: + 47 22 38 10 40**

**Email: teedor@online.no**

**Salutation: Dear Sir or Madam**

**COPIES TO:** Tamil community groups in your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 28 March 2002.