

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 37/009/2001

UA 163/01

Possible "disappearance"/fear of torture

3 July 2001

SRI LANKA

Karupaiya Suntharerasa (18)
Sivarasa Sasikumar (20)

Karupaya Suntharerasa and Sivarasa Sasikumar have not been seen since 9 June, when they were taken for questioning by an armed political group which operates alongside the Sri Lankan army. They are at grave risk of torture, and are feared to have "disappeared".

Karupaiya Suntharerasa had gone to a People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) camp called "Malai Maligai" at Rambaikulam, seeking information about someone else held at the camp. This person has since been released, but there is no news of Karupaiya Suntharerasa.

Sivarasa Sasikumar lives with his parents at the Sithamberapuram Welfare Centre, a camp for internally displaced people awaiting resettlement. He was waiting in line to be photographed for relocation documents when PLOTE member approached him and ordered him, in front of many witnesses, to come with him to the local PLOTE camp, at Sithamberapuram.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Those detained by the Tamil armed groups working with the security forces in Sri Lanka such as the PLOTE are frequently tortured or "disappear" while in custody. Many of the "disappeared" are suspected to have been tortured to death in secret places of detention.

Security forces in Sri Lanka persistently allow (if not encourage) members of armed Tamil groups to carry out search operations and screen civilians. This practise has often led to a range of human rights violations including illegal arrest, prolonged detention, torture, "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions.

Until May 2000 it was a legal requirement that each place of detention had to be designated as such and its designation published in the official Gazette. After the introduction of new emergency regulations, that is no longer the case and detainees can now be lawfully held in unauthorised places of detention. Amnesty International is concerned that the removal of such safeguards has increased the possibility of prisoners being held in secret detention and tortured.

Thousands of internally displaced people live in Vavuniya district. Security forces personnel and armed Tamil groups working alongside them play an active role in trying to identify possible members of the armed opposition group Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) among these people. The LTTE is fighting the Sri Lankan security forces for greater autonomy in the north and east of Sri Lanka.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Karupaiya Suntharerasa and Sivarasa Sasikumar, who have not been seen since they were questioned by PLOTE on 9 June 2001;
- urging the authorities to reveal where they are;
- asking that they be immediately released, or transferred to a place of detention under the authority of the Sri Lankan state and charged with a recognisably criminal offense, and allowed access to their family, lawyers and necessary medical care;
- urging that those responsible for their "disappearance" are brought to justice;
- calling for armed Tamil groups to be brought under the command and control of the armed forces;

- seeking the reintroduction of the requirement that all places of detention are designated and gazetted as such.

APPEALS TO:

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

Lieutenant-General Lionel Balagalle
Army Commander
Army Headquarters
Flagstaff Street
Colombo 1
Sri Lanka

Telegrams: Commander of the Army, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Faxes: + 94 1 44 00 87

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 14 August 2001.