

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

30 April 1999

SRI LANKA

Sivam Ashokumar (20)

Amnesty International is gravely concerned for the safety of Sivam Ashokumar who may be at risk from members of the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), an armed Tamil group fighting alongside the Sri Lankan security forces, attempting to force him to retract information about his detention and torture at Kovilkulam PLOTE camp earlier this year. This information was provided to Amnesty International via several reliable sources in Vavuniya.

Amnesty International today learned that members of PLOTE, possibly with the connivance of members of the army in Vavuniya, may be putting pressure on Sivam Ashokumar to retract this information.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action appeal (UA 29/99) on behalf of Sivam Ashokumar on 23 February 1999 following news that he had "disappeared" after he was taken away by two PLOTE members on 24 January. Subsequently, Sivam Ashokumar was released from the custody of the PLOTE on 4 March 1999.

Amnesty International later learned that he had been tortured while held at Kovilkulam PLOTE camp and reported this in its Urgent Action appeal follow-up of 25 March 1999. It also continues to be concerned about the "disappearance" of at least five other people taken away by members of PLOTE in that period.

The authorities have ordered an inquiry by the Criminal Investigation Department into continuing "disappearances" reported from the Vavuniya area. An inquiry within the military is reportedly also under way, but Amnesty International is concerned that these are not independent inquiries. It has evidence of connivance by the army with members of the PLOTE.

There is also concern that elements within the security forces, possibly with the agreement of the political leadership, are helping PLOTE to protect the secrecy of their camps and the torture taking place there. In late March 1999, army personnel raided several illegal camps run by PLOTE in Vavuniya but reportedly failed to find any prisoners. It cannot be excluded that the leaders of these groups were tipped off about the raids by sympathetic army personnel. It is high time that an independent inquiry is held into the continuing existence of illegal detention centres in the Vavuniya area.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Sivam Ashokumar, who is feared to be under pressure from the PLOTE and possibly army to retract information about his recent detention and torture at the Kovilkulam PLOTE camp;
- urging that all necessary steps are taken to safeguard his life;
- urging that members of PLOTE are ordered not to put any pressure on Sivam Asokumar to retract the information he provided;
- urging that a fully independent investigation into the continuing existence of illegal detention centres in the Vavuniya area is set up.

APPEALS TO:

Her Excellency President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga
Presidential Residence
"Temple Trees"
Colombo 3, Sri Lanka

Telegrams: President Kumaratunga, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Faxes: + 94 1 33 37 03

Salutation: Your Excellency

R K Chandrananda de Silva

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Secretary

Ministry of Defence

No 15/5 Baladaksha Mawatha

Colombo 3, Sri Lanka

Telegrams: Secretary Defence Ministry, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Faxes: + 94 1 54 15 29

Salutation: Dear Secretary

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 11 June 1999.