

EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 37/11/97

UA 132/97

"Disappearance"

2 May 1997

SRI LANKAKandiah Sivakumar, aged 20

Kanagasabai Ravichandran, aged 20

Kandiah Sivakumar and Kanagasabai Ravichandran, two firewood sellers from Rukam village, have been reported "disappeared" after they were taken into custody by the army near the Black Bridge, Chenkalady, Batticaloa district on 20 April 1997.

According to eye-witnesses, they were stopped by soldiers from the Kommadurai army camp at around 2pm. They were on their way home from Eravur where they had gone to sell firewood. Their bicycles were also taken. The reason for their arrest is not known, but it is possible that they were suspected of having links with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the main armed opposition group fighting for an independent state in the north and east of the country. The village of Rukam is in an LTTE-controlled area.

When the young men's parents went to make inquiries at Kommadurai army camp the next day, the army officials told them that Kandiah Sivakumar and Kanagasabai Ravichandran had already been released. However, they had not returned home. Further inquiries by the Batticaloa Peace Committee and members of parliament have met with the same response.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

For years, "disappearances" have been reported in large numbers in Sri Lanka. The United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances reports that it received more than 11,000 complaints from Sri Lanka between 1983 and 1990. In 1991, it received 410 and after that the number of cases declined. After the resumption, in April 1995, of the armed conflict between the security forces and the LTTE, "disappearances" began to be reported again, despite some measures taken by the government to prevent their occurrence.

Between late 1995 and early 1997, the total number of "disappearances" reported to Amnesty International reached 648, the highest number since 1990. That more than 600 "disappearances" have occurred in about one year highlights the need for immediate action to be taken to prevent these violations from continuing.

Recently the Sri Lankan Government pledged at the United Nations Commission for Human Rights that "full rigours of the law will be brought to bear" on the perpetrators of human rights violations. Amnesty International is urging that those responsible for "disappearances" be brought to justice without exception and that the Prevention of Terrorism Act and Emergency Regulations, which provide a ready context for these violations to occur, be amended.

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

- expressing concern about the arrest and subsequent "disappearance" of Kandiah Sivakumar and Kanagasabai Ravichandran on 20 April at Chenkalady, Batticaloa district;
- urging that an independent investigation into their fate or whereabouts be established, the results of which should be made public;
- welcoming the initial steps already taken to bring to justice the alleged perpetrators responsible for certain incidents of human rights violations, including "disappearances";

- urging that those responsible for the "disappearances" of Kandiah Sivakumar and Kanagasabai Ravichandran and the many other "disappearances" recently reported in Sri Lanka be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

Her Excellency President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga
Presidential Residence
"Temple Trees"
Colombo 3, Sri Lanka
Faxes: + 94 1 33 37 03
Telegrams: President Kumaratunga, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Salutation: Your Excellency

The Hon (General) Anuruddha Ratwatte
Deputy Minister of Defence
Ministry of Defence
15/5 Baladaksha Mawatha
Colombo 3, Sri Lanka
Faxes: + 94 1 54 15 29 or 68 77 68
Telegrams: Deputy Defence Minister, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Salutation: Dear Minister

Lt-General Rohan Daluwatte
Army Commander
Army Headquarters
Flagstaff Street
Colombo 1, Sri Lanka
Telegrams: Army Commander, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Salutation: Dear Army Commander

COPIES TO:

Justice O S M Seneviratne
Chairman
National Human Rights Commission
c/o Human Rights Foundation
27 Independence Avenue
Colombo 7
Sri Lanka

and 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 13 June 1997.