

EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 37/24/95

24 October 1995

Further information on UA 121/95 (ASA 37/09/95, 26 May 1995) and follow-up (ASA 37/22/95, 19 September 1995) - Deliberate and arbitrary killings / Fear of further killings

SRI LANKAAt least 90 more civilians killed

Members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are reported to have deliberately killed at least 90 civilians in four separate attacks in the past few days. On 21 October, attacks on Padaviya in Anuradhapura District, Boatta in Polonnaruwa District and Mangalagama in Amparai District, left 19, 36 and 16 civilians dead, nearly all Sinhalese. In another attack on 22 October in the village of Kotiyagala, Moneragala District, 19 Sinhalese were reportedly killed.

According to survivors at Boatta, Polonnaruwa District members of the LTTE came in the night and entered houses, killing people in their sleep. Among those killed are reported to be 28 adults and eight children, among them 10 Tamils. One family of a home guard (see below) was reportedly specifically targeted and killed although the home guard himself was not present.

At Kotiyagala, survivors reportedly gave evidence to journalists that approximately 50 LTTE members entered the village around 5.30pm. They hacked to death several people as they were returning from the field. Others were shot dead while in the field or in the village. Among the victims are six men, four women and ten children.

On the basis of the evidence available, all the victims appear to have been civilians. Although home guards (villagers provided with arms by the security forces to defend the villages against LTTE attacks) were present in the villages, none of them was reportedly killed.

Amnesty International is once again concerned that civilians appear to have been deliberately and arbitrarily killed in direct violation of the Geneva Conventions. It presses upon the LTTE that it is an essential obligation under humanitarian law to at all times maintain the distinction between the civilian population and combatants and that in case of doubt regarding the status of any individual, he or she should be presumed to be a civilian.

FURTHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since the resumption of the armed conflict in the northeast of Sri Lanka in April, there have been reports of human rights abuses by both the Sri Lankan security forces and members of the LTTE. The latest reports of deliberate and arbitrary killings by the LTTE in the east come at a time of a large-scale offensive by the Sri Lankan army in the northern Jaffna peninsula. The latter is largely controlled by the LTTE, who are fighting for a separate state in the northeast of Sri Lanka.

While the north is predominantly Tamil, the east has almost equal number of Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim residents. Attacks by the LTTE on Sinhalese and Muslim villages have been reported in the past in the east and in areas immediately adjoining the present Northeastern Province, including Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Moneragala districts.

In September, Amnesty International appealed to both the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE to take all necessary measures to protect civilians and others taking no active part in the fighting.

Following the original Urgent Action of 26 May 1995, thousands of appeals were sent to the LTTE calling for an immediate halt to deliberate and arbitrary killings of civilians after an attack on a Sinhala fishing hamlet in Trincomalee district. In a 6-page response issued by its International Secretariat in London, United Kingdom, the LTTE appeared to acknowledge, without explicitly saying so, that the 42 villagers were killed by the LTTE. It argued that their killing could be justified under international humanitarian law because they were considered by the LTTE to be actively taking part in the conflict between the Sri Lankan security forces and the LTTE because they were part of the Sri Lankan Government's "war for land" in the east.

Amnesty International issued a public response (see ASA 37/18/95, September 1995) stating it believed that, because there were no reports of any of the villagers having used arms prior to or at the time of the attack by the LTTE, they could not be considered to be legitimate targets under international humanitarian law.

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

- expressing deep concern about the deliberate and arbitrary killing of at least 90 civilians on 21 and 22 October by members of the LTTE;
- urging that these killings be investigated and that all steps are taken to ensure that members of the LTTE suspected of being responsible are removed from any positions or duties which bring them into contact with civilians;
- urging that all necessary measures are taken to prevent further killings of civilians;
- requesting that Amnesty International's appeals be conveyed to the LTTE leadership in Sri Lanka.

APPEALS TO:

Please organize appeals to the first two listed and then as many as you are able in approximately equal numbers to the following addresses.

Lawrence Thilakar
Member of Central Committee
Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
International Secretariat
211, Katherine Road
London E6 1BU, United Kingdom

Faxes: * 44 181 470 8593

Telegrams: Mr Thilakar, 211 Katherine Road, London E6, UK

Salutation: Dear Mr Thilakar

Tamil Co-ordinating Committee
341, rue des Pyrenees
75020 Paris, France

Faxes: * 33 1 435 81191

Telegrams: Tamil Committee, 341 rue des Pyrenees, 75020 Paris, France

Salutation: Dear Sir/Madam

*** Salutation for others: Dear Sir/Madam**

World Tamil Movement
64, Eaton Avenue
Toronto, Ontario
M4J 2Z5, Canada

Faxes: * 1416 462 9302

Telegrams: World Tamil Movement, 64 Eaton Ave, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

World Tamil Coordinating Council
Gold Gasse - 8
7000 Chur, Switzerland

Telegrams: WTCC, Gold Gasse 8, 7000 Chur, Switzerland

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
P.O. Box 47
7600 Struer, Denmark

Tamil Coordinating Committee
P.O. Box 1699 Vika
0110 Oslo 1, Norway

Faxes: * 47 22 190 114

Tamil Coordinating Committee
P.O. Box 694, Mulgrave North
Victoria 3170
Australia

Tamil Confederation - Germany
P.O. Box 340251
5270 Gummersbach 34, Germany

Tamil Coordinating Committee
Groot Hertoginnelaan 106
2517 EL Den Haag
The Netherlands

COPIES TO: other Tamil organizations in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 12 December 1995.