

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: ASA 37/006/2004 (Public)
News Service No: 278
4 November 2004

Sri Lanka: Free Nallarattnam Singarasa

The deadline has now passed for the Sri Lankan government to respond to a UN recommendation calling for the release or retrial of Nallarattnam Singarasa, who was tortured and has spent more than ten years in prison following an unfair trial.

"We urge the Sri Lankan government to immediately comply with the recommendation of the committee," said Amnesty International and Interights, (the International Centre for the Legal Protection of Human Rights). "In light of the amount of time Nallarattnam Singarasa has spent in prison and the severe torture he has suffered, the government should release him as soon as possible."

Nallarattnam Singarasa, an ethnic Tamil, was arrested in July 1993 during the long-running conflict between the government and Tamil separatists. He claims to have been subjected to severe torture following his arrest, which included having his head held inside a tank of water. A doctor later found scars on his back and eye resulting from the torture. During his detention Nallarattnam Singarasa was denied access to a lawyer and an interpreter. He claims he was forced to put his thumb print on a "confession" written in Sinhalese, a language which he did not understand. In September 1995 Nallarattnam was convicted of crimes under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) including conspiracy to overthrow the government. He was sentenced to 50 years imprisonment.

In July this year the UN Human Rights Committee reviewed his case and concluded that Nallarattnam Singarasa's right to a fair trial had been violated as his conviction was based solely on his supposed "confession" and as he had been denied access to an interpreter during interrogation. The committee also criticised the fact that the onus was put on Nallarattnam Singarasa to prove that his confession had been obtained by torture and concluded that the government had failed in its obligation to effectively investigate allegations of torture.

The Sri Lankan government were given 90 days to respond to the recommendation of the Human Rights Committee at the beginning of August. However, three months later Nallarattnam Singarasa is still in prison although he desperately hopes that this recommendation will lead to his release.

Amnesty International and Interights are concerned that the PTA provides an incentive for interrogating officers to obtain "confessions" from detainees by any means, including torture. This is because the PTA allows for "confessions" to be used as evidence in court as long as they are heard by officers above a certain rank. Amnesty International has consistently called for the Act to be repealed or brought into line with international human rights standards.

Public Document

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