

**EXTERNAL (for general distribution)**

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**Fear of Torture**

**6 January 1995**

**SRI LANKA**

**Velayutham Varnakulasingham, alias "Yakko", aged 23**

Amnesty International fears for the safety of Velayutham Varnakulasingham, who was reportedly abducted on 19 December 1994 by six members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) while he was attending the funeral of a relative in Pallikudiruppu, Muttur, Trincomalee district. He was reportedly beaten at the time of the abduction, despite protests from his relatives and others attending the funeral.

According to unconfirmed reports, he is being kept in the custody of the LTTE at a camp near Uppurel, Kunithivu, Trincomalee district.

Velayutham Varnakulasingham, a farmer's son, returned to Sri Lanka from India in mid-1994. Since his return he has been actively campaigning for the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), a Tamil political party. Velayutham Varnakulasingham's abduction was apparently due to his membership of the EPRLF. Amnesty International fears that he may be subjected to torture during interrogation about his political activities.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

For more than a decade, the LTTE has been fighting Sri Lankan government forces with the aim of establishing a separate Tamil state, which they call Eelam, in the northeast of the country. Both sides have been responsible for numerous human rights abuses.

Abuses of human rights committed by the LTTE include the deliberate killing of hundreds of non-combatant Muslim and Sinhalese civilians, the arbitrary killing of civilians in attacks on buses and trains, the torture and killing of prisoners, and abductions for ransom. The LTTE has also executed prisoners accused of being "traitors" to their cause. Some suspected informers have been executed in public.

The number of prisoners held by the LTTE is not known. They include Tamil people who have criticized LTTE policies or who the LTTE believe may pose a political challenge to them, people who were former members of rival Tamil militant groups, and Tamil and Muslim hostages held for ransom. The LTTE has not informed relatives of the whereabouts or fate of many of its prisoners, some of whom have reportedly been tortured and killed. Apart from civilians, the LTTE also holds members of the security forces in their custody. Delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have been granted regular access to these captured service personnel and occasionally their relatives too have been allowed to visit them. However, relatives of other prisoners have not been given any access and many have complained to Amnesty International that they have not been given any information at all about the fate or whereabouts of their captured relatives.

Most of the abductions of political opponents by the LTTE have been reported from the Jaffna peninsula, which is largely under its control. However, throughout the period since 1990 reports of abductions for ransom by LTTE members have been reported from Trincomalee and Batticaloa District in the eastern part of Sri Lanka too. To date, no ransom has been asked in the case of Velayutham Varnakulasingham.

The EPRLF was one of the Tamil armed groups set up in the 1970s fighting for a separate state in the northeast of Sri Lanka. The group supported the Indo-Sri Lanka accord of July 1987, and fought the LTTE during the presence of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in the northeast of Sri Lanka. It had control over the Northeast Provincial Council at the time. Following the withdrawal of the IPKF in early 1990, thousands of members and supporters of the EPRLF fled to India. Contrary to several other armed Tamil groups opposed to the LTTE, most members of the EPRLF did not take up arms after the outbreak of the fighting between the LTTE and the government forces in the northeast in June 1990. The EPRLF has contested several local and national elections, including the parliamentary elections in August 1994.

The People's Alliance won these parliamentary elections. Its leader, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, was appointed President after she won elections in November. In October a number of goodwill measures were taken, including the release of prisoners by both the government and the LTTE. Representatives of both sides met in October. However, further meetings were suspended following the killing of Gamini Dissanayake, presidential candidate for the United National Party and more than 50 others at an election rally by a suicide bomber suspected to belong to the LTTE. On 3 January, talks resumed. On 8 January 1995, a ceasefire is due to come into force.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Velayutham Varnakulasingham, who was reportedly abducted by members of the LTTE at Pallikudiruppu, Muttur, Trincomalee district on 19 December 1994;
- requesting the LTTE to reveal his whereabouts and his state of health and allow immediate access to relatives, a doctor and members of the ICRC;
- urging the LTTE to treat all prisoners in their custody in accordance with the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and Additional Protocols I and II thereto, by which it publicly announced it would abide in February 1988;
- pointing out that common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions at any time and in any place prohibits the torture and cruel treatment of prisoners.

*This is a limited action. Please restrict appeals to 20 per section.*

**APPEALS TO**

1) Lawrence Thilakar  
Tamil Coordinating Committee  
341 Rue des Pyrenees  
75020 Paris, France

**Telegrams: Mr Thilakar, TCC, 341 Rue des Pyrenees, Paris, France**

**Faxes: + 33 1 43 58 11 91**

**Salution: Dear Mr Thilakar**

2) LTTE International Secretariat  
United Tamil Organization  
211 Katherine Road  
London E8 1BU  
United Kingdom

**Telegrams: LTTE, UTO, 211 Katherine Road, London, UK**

**Faxes: + 44 81 470 8593**

**Salution: Dear Sir or Madam**

**COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:** LTTE offices in your own countries, if any.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your Section office, if sending appeals after 25 February 1995.