

EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 37/02/96

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

UA 07/96

"Disappearances"

12 January 1996

SRI LANKA Manikapodi Shanthakumar
Devanayagam Kiruparajah
Somasundaram Linganayagam
Ananthan Sinnapodiyar
Samithamby Velakuddy
Kandappan Govindan
Vinayagamoorthy Karalasingham
Periyathamby Vellapodi
Thiyagarajah Jeyasangar
Ponnambalam Koneswaran
Nagalingam Rishikeshamoorthy, aged 36

The 11 people named above are reported to have "disappeared" in Batticaloa District between 17 December 1995 and 1 January 1996.

On 17 December, Manikapodi Shanthakumar, Devanayagam Kiruparajah, Somasundaram Linganayagam, Ananthan Sinnapodiyar, Samithamby Velakuddy, Kandappan Govindan and one other person were reportedly arrested around 7am by a group of Sinhala home guards at Unnichchai while they were grazing their cattle. According to the seventh person, who managed to escape, the home guards were armed with shotguns. They tied the hands of four people with rope and forced the others to walk along with them. He said he thought the guards could have been from Mangalagama, a Sinhala village nearby, just over the border with Amparai District. He reported the arrest of the six others at the Batticaloa police station, to the International Committee of the Red Cross and to the local Human Rights Task Force (HRTF) office.

On 21 December, another four people from Unnichchai, Vinayagamoorthy Karalasingham, Periyathamby Vellapodi, Thiyagarajah Jeyasangar and Ponnambalam Koneswaran, reportedly "disappeared" after being taken away as they were collecting firewood by people believed to be Sinhala home guards at Kopaveli. Villagers of Kopaveli say they heard them being scolded in Sinhala.

A local member of parliament (MP) raised the arrest of the first six with the Deputy Minister of Defence on 19 December and of all 10 people with the President on 22 December. As of 11 January, he had not received a response. Despite further local inquiries, including by HRTF officers at Batticaloa and Amparai, there has been no news on the whereabouts of the 10.

Nagalingam Rishikeshamoorthy, a private bus conductor for the Chenkalady Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society "disappeared" after he went to the shop of the Cooperative Society to hand over the money collected from the bus passengers on 1 January 1996. When he did not return home, his relatives went in search of him. They were told that his bicycle, on which he had gone to the shop, was seen at the local camp of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO - see below), which is situated near the Chenkalady army camp. When relatives inquired at the TELO camp, they were told that Nagalingam Rishikeshamoorthy was not there. A local MP raised his arrest and subsequent "disappearance" with the commander of the army camp. To date, no information has been provided about his fate or whereabouts.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There have been several reports of alleged "disappearances" from Batticaloa District against a background of continuing armed conflict in the northeast of the country between members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the main armed opposition group fighting for an independent state in the area, and the security forces. Since the fighting resumed in April 1995, Amnesty International has recorded 18 "disappearances" from Batticaloa District, not counting the 11 mentioned above.

Batticaloa District is in the east of the country and has an ethnically mixed population. About 75% are Tamil, the rest are Muslim and Sinhalese. In neighbouring districts, there are almost equal numbers of Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims. In recent years, and again following the resumption of the fighting in April 1995, members of the Sinhala and Muslim communities were issued with weapons by the security forces. The justification for the distribution of arms was repeated attacks by members of the LTTE on members of the Sinhala and Muslim communities in the area. In addition, the armed cadres of anti-LTTE militant groups, such as TELO, were mobilised to assist the security forces.

Amnesty International has condemned LTTE attacks on civilians. It has also expressed concern that the issuing of arms to civilians could lead to an escalation of violence and further human rights violations. In mid-1990 in particular, Sinhala and Muslim home guards were held responsible for extrajudicial executions and "disappearances" of members of the Tamil community in reprisal for LTTE attacks on members of their communities. The "disappearances" of the 11 people named above are the first ones reported to Amnesty International since the resumption of the fighting in April 1995 in which members of these groups are alleged to be responsible.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the 11 people who reportedly "disappeared" after being taken away by Sinhala home guards and TELO cadres [where possible, give names, dates, and further details];
- urging that the government swiftly investigate their whereabouts and welfare, and make its findings public;
- calling for immediate steps to bring to justice any member of the security forces, including home guards or cadres of anti-LTTE Tamil groups, responsible for "disappearances" or other human rights violations.

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 (Colonel) Anuruddha Ratwatte
 Deputy Minister of Defence, Ministry of Defence
 15/5 Baladaksha Mawatha, Colombo 3, Sri Lanka

Faxes: + 94 1 68 77 68 or 54 15 29

Telegrams: Deputy Defence Minister, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Salutation: Dear Minister

W G Rajaguru
Inspector General of Police
Police Headquarters, Colombo 1, Sri Lanka
Faxes: + 94 1 43 89 15
Telegrams: Inspector General of Police, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Salutation: Dear Inspector General of Police

Lt-General Gerry de Silva
Army Commander, Army Headquarters
Flagstaff Street, Colombo 1, Sri Lanka
Telegrams: Army Commander, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Salutation: Dear Army Commander

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 1 March 1996.