

EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 37/03/96

UA 24/96 Deliberate and arbitrary killings /  
Fear of further killings

1 February 1996

**SRI LANKAAt least 80 civilians**

---

At least 80 civilians were deliberately and arbitrarily killed when a lorry containing explosives was driven into the entrance of the Central Bank in Fort, central Colombo, on 31 January 1996. Observers believe that members of a Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)'s suicide squad were driving the lorry.

According to eye-witnesses, three armed men drove the lorry up to the front of the building, two of them jumped out and started shooting at random. The other one drove the lorry into the gate, which had been closed by a security guard, detonating the explosives in it. Among those killed were passersby, employees of the bank and other institutions and offices in the area, all of whom appear to be civilians. Hundreds more were injured.

Although the LTTE has not acknowledged responsibility, the manner in which the attack was carried out is reminiscent of similar attacks on military targets attributed to them in the last few years. The two armed men in the lorry have reportedly been arrested and are said to have confessed to being members of the LTTE.

According to a *Reuters* report, the LTTE claimed in a radio message that "military analysts have said it is the work of the security forces". A spokesperson at the LTTE's International Secretariat in London declined to comment on this report and said that due to difficulty in communication with the leadership in Sri Lanka, they were not able to issue a statement.

In a press release of 19 January 1996 headed Warning Again, delivered at the offices of the Colombo newspaper, *The Island*, on 31 January, the *Ellalan Force*, widely believed to be a front organization for the LTTE, warned tourists and investors not to come to Sri Lanka and help the government in its military offensive, including bombing and shelling. It said: "The Ellalan Force won't be responsible for the casualties due to the bomb explosion in future" [sic].

Amnesty International considers such killings of civilians in large numbers to be a clear and abhorrent violation of humanitarian law. The organization fears further such killings unless the LTTE leadership take immediate measures to put a stop to them.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Amnesty International has repeatedly appealed to both the LTTE and to the Government of Sri Lanka to avoid deliberate and arbitrary killings in the context of the ongoing armed conflict in the northeast of the country. It reiterated its appeal on 26 September 1995 amid reports of escalating fighting in the northern Jaffna peninsula during a large-scale military offensive launched by the government aimed at taking control of Jaffna town, the main town which had been under control of the LTTE since 1990.

During the military offensive, there were a number of reports of killings of civilians during alleged indiscriminate bombing and shelling by the security forces. There were also allegations of deliberate and arbitrary killings. However, due to restrictions imposed on travel to the area and a press censorship

in force at the time, independent information about the alleged human rights abuses was limited.

Amnesty International does not take a position on the legitimacy of resorting to arms to pursue political goals. Neither does it address the general issue of military tactics. Rather, the organization calls on all parties to a conflict to respect basic principles of international humanitarian law, and in particular to refrain from deliberate and arbitrary killings, including the killing of civilians. In a letter of 11 September 1995 to the LTTE's main representative abroad (which was made public - see UA 121/95, ASA 37/09/95, 26 May 1995 and follow-ups ASA 37/22/95, 19 September and ASA 37/24/95, 24 October), Amnesty International set out in detail its concerns about continuing reports of deliberate and arbitrary killings of civilians by members of the LTTE.

Amnesty International, in a message sent on 31 January 1996 to President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, appealed for all necessary measures to be taken to prevent any reprisal killings of Tamil civilians in either Colombo or other areas of the country.

**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 80 civilians, allegedly by members of a LTTE suicide squad in Colombo;
- urging that, if the LTTE is indeed responsible for this attack, urgent steps are taken to ensure an immediate halt to any 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 25 March 1996.