

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 37/17/00

UA 172/00

Fear of T

SRI LANKAAmirthalingam Amuthini, aged 31 (f)

Mother-of-two Amirthalingam Amuthini may have been tortured in police custody, and remains in serious danger.

She was arrested by police officers of the Security Co-ordinating Unit (SCU) in Vavuniya on 30 May, who took her from her home in Shanthasolai to the SCU office in Vavuniya town. The SCU is a police unit involved in interrogating suspected members of the armed opposition group Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Her mother, aged 65, has been allowed to visit her once, but they were not allowed to speak. Amirthalingam Amuthini reportedly had injuries to her right hand, and could not lift her arm. Police have reportedly also abused her mother verbally for making a complaint to the National Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka about the case.

No representatives of the National Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka are known to have visited Amirthalingam Amuthini.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Torture has been widespread in Sri Lanka for many years and appears to be on the increase in recent months. Amnesty International has obtained many testimonies of torture, corroborated by medical certificates.

Many of the recent reports of torture are linked to the conflict between the security forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the main armed opposition group fighting for an independent Tamil state in the north and east of the country. The fighting in the northern Jaffna peninsula increased sharply in April this year, and since then there has been an increase in reports of torture, including reports from elsewhere in the country.

After this increase in violence, the government issued new Emergency Regulations in early May, under which the security forces were given wider powers to arrest and detain suspects. Prisoners can now be held for questioning for up to 90 days. After 30 days police can apply to a magistrate to have this period extended for a further six months, during which detainees must be held in a prison, where the risk of torture is lower.

Suspects can also to be held in preventive detention for up to a year, without being produced before a court, on the orders of the Defence Secretary, whose power to detain has been considerably extended.

Suspects held under the Prevention of Terrorism Act can be detained for up to 18 months in security forces custody.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Amirthalingam Amuthini, who is feared to have been tortured in police custody at the SCU office in Vavuniya town;
- urging the authorities to undertake full and immediate investigations into these reports and take the necessary steps to bring those responsible to justice;

- expressing concern about the increased powers given to the security forces to arrest and detain suspects under the new Emergency Regulations issued in May 2000.

APPEALS TO:

President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga
Presidential Residence, "Temple Trees", Colombo 3, SRI LANKA
Telegrams: President Kumaratunga, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Faxes: +94 1 44 66 57
Salutation: Your Excellency

Inspector General of Police Lakshman Kodituwaka
Police Headquarters, New Secretariat, Colombo 1, SRI LANKA
Telegrams: Inspector General Police, Sri Lanka
Faxes: +94 1 43 89 15
Salutation: Dear Inspector General

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 2 August 2000.