

UA 217/99

Deliberate

Rajavarothiyam Sampanthan (member of parliament)

Y Balachandran (member of parliament)

Veerasingham Anandasangari

Nadarasa Raviraj

K Sivajilingam

and other Tamil politicians not taking direct part in hostilities

SRI LANKA

Amnesty International is concerned for the lives of several politicians belonging to Tamil political parties represented in Sri Lanka's parliament. They include members of parliament, party leaders and elected representatives functioning in local authority bodies in the north and east of the country.

Their lives are at risk from members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), an armed opposition group fighting for an independent state of Tamil Eelam in the north and east of Sri Lanka. The LTTE has repeatedly issued notices calling on members of these parties to resign or face the consequences. Many of them have received threatening letters and telephone calls, in the name of the LTTE, or front organizations such as the "Sangilian Force", "Ellalan" and "Pandara Vanniyan Group".

Among the people considered to be at immediate risk are Rajavarothiyam Sampanthan, Secretary General and member of parliament (MP) for the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), and Veerasingham Anandasangari, Vice President of the TULF. According to newspaper reports, their names are on an LTTE "hitlist", which the police recently obtained information about. The name of Neelan Thiruchelvam, another MP representing the TULF, was reportedly also on this list. Neelan Thiruchelvam was killed by a suicide bomber suspected to be a member of the LTTE near his home in Colombo on 29 July.

In Jaffna district, local politicians belonging to these parties have also repeatedly received death threats. Among them are Nadarasa Raviraj, acting mayor of Jaffna and other politicians belonging to the TULF. K Sivajilingam, Chairman of the Valvettiturai Urban Council and member of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), is also reported to be at immediate risk.

Although some of these politicians have been provided with protection by the government of Sri Lanka and are being accompanied by armed bodyguards, in Amnesty International's view, this does not alter their civilian status.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The LTTE has been held responsible for numerous human rights abuses, including widespread killing of civilians. Among them were several politicians belonging to Tamil political parties represented in Sri Lanka's parliament.

Most recently, as stated above, Dr Neelan Thiruchelvam, MP was killed. In 1998, Sarojini Yogeswaran, mayor of Jaffna, and her successor, Ponnuthurai Sivapalan, were killed. In 1997, Arunasalam Thangathurai, MP, was shot dead in Trincomalee. In 1989, the then leader of the TULF, Appapillai Amirthalingam, and Vettivelu Yogeswaran, MP, were killed by gunmen at Amirthalingam's house in Colombo. While the LTTE claimed responsibility for the latter two killings, its leaders have remained silent about the other killings. The "Sangilian Force" reportedly claimed responsibility for the killing of Sarojini Yogeswaran. A hand-delivered letter to the Jaffna-based newspaper, *Uthayan*, stated that she had been killed "for refusing to step down from the mayor's post".

The LTTE has also increased its intimidation of local councillors functioning in Jaffna district. In April 1998, all members of the newly elected local government bodies there were ordered to resign immediately or face death if they failed to comply. At least eleven local councillors in the Jaffna district have since been killed. Among them was Murugan Poopalasingham, member of the Kopay local council, elected under the banner of the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), who was killed in May 1999.

Amnesty International's appeals are guided by the principles of protection of the individual enshrined in Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949. Common Article 3 forbids governments and armed opposition groups alike to torture, to deliberately kill civilians taking no part in hostilities, to harm those who are wounded, captured or seeking to surrender, or to take hostages. Sri Lanka ratified the Geneva Conventions in 1959. In February 1988 the LTTE announced that it would abide by the provisions of the Geneva Conventions and its Optional Protocols I and II.

Amnesty International's action on behalf of these politicians should in no way be interpreted as an endorsement of them or their parties' political platform. As an impartial and independent human rights organization, Amnesty International's appeals are issued on the basis of international standards. In particular, Amnesty International believes that these killings are in clear violation of international humanitarian law, which prohibits the killing of anyone who is not taking a direct part in hostilities.

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

- explaining Amnesty International's action on behalf of those protected under Article 3 common to the Geneva Conventions and noting the LTTE's announcement in February 1988 that it would abide by the provisions of the Geneva Conventions and its Optional Protocols I and II;
- condemning the deliberate and arbitrary killing of members of parliament and politicians belonging to political parties represented in Sri Lanka's parliament as being in violation of international humanitarian law;
- expressing concern for the lives of Nadaraja Raviraj, Rajavarothiyam Sampanthan, Y Balachandran, K Sivajilingam and Veerasingham Anandasangari and other national and local politicians belonging to these parties, who reportedly are under threat from the LTTE;
- urging that a clear statement condemning the deliberate and arbitrary killings of all civilians, including politicians not taking direct part in hostilities, is issued by the leadership of the LTTE;
- appealing to the LTTE for an immediate halt to attacks on people taking no direct part in hostilities by the LTTE or by forces under LTTE control.

APPEALS TO:

Mr V. Manoharan
 Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
 International House
 Eelam House
 202 Long Lane
 London SE1 4QB, United Kingdom
Telegrams: LTTE, 202 Long Lane, London, SE1
Faxes: + 44 171 403 1653
Salutation: Mr V. Manoharan

Salutation for addresses listed below: Dear Sir/Madam

Tamil Co-ordinating Committee
 341, rue des Pyrenees
 75020 Paris, France
Telegrams: Tamil Committee, 341 rue des Pyrenees, 75020 Paris, France

Faxes: + 33 1 435 81191 (may get a wait signal, "attendez s'il vous plaît")

COPIES TO:

World Tamil Movement
64, Eaton Avenue
Toronto, Ontario
M4J 2Z5, Canada

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
P.O. Box 47
7600 Struer, Denmark

World Tamil Coordinating Council
Gold Gasse - 8
7000 Chur, Switzerland

Tamil Coordinating Committee
P.O. Box 1699 Vika
0110 Oslo 1, Norway

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
and other Tamil organizations in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 6 October 1999.