

SRI LANKA Sri Ram, student

Anthonipillai Binoth Vimalraj

Sivagnanasunderam Sri Kanthan (28)

The three young Tamil men named above have been severely tortured in police custody in the capital, Colombo. All three may be in need of medical attention.

Sri Ram has been severely assaulted by police at Mirihana police station. A final year student at the Open University, he was arrested on 25 August 1999 at Kotahena in connection with the killing of Dr Neelan Thiruchelvam, a member of parliament, by a Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) suicide bomber. Eight other students arrested by the Mirihana police have since been released: two of them were badly tortured, and have scars from being beaten on their backs and hung up by their wrists.

Anthonipillai Binoth Vimalraj, originally from Mannar, was arrested on 24 August at New Asia lodge. During interrogation at Kotahena police station he was allegedly beaten all over his body, had pins inserted under his fingernails and had an iron rod inserted into his anus.

Sivagnanasunderam Sri Kanthan is in custody at the headquarters of the Crime Detection Bureau (CDB) in Colombo. Relatives were allowed to visit him for the first time on 4 September, a month after his arrest, for five minutes. They say his face was swollen, he had difficulty walking and appeared to have a fever. Other sources reported that he had been hung by a rope and beaten all over his body. Sivagnanasunderam Sri Kanthan, originally from Kodikamam, Jaffna, was arrested on 4 August at Wellawatte.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

For years, torture has been one of the most widespread human rights violations in Sri Lanka. Amnesty International has obtained many testimonies from victims of torture, and medical certificates corroborating these testimonies. The prevalence of torture is also revealed in Supreme Court judgements awarding compensation to victims of torture, and in recent reports from government inquiry commissions: the Committee to Enquire into Unlawful Arrests and Harassment recorded 47 complaints of torture between July and December 1998.

There have been widespread reports of torture since the conflict between the security forces and the LTTE resumed in April 1995. The LTTE are fighting for an independent state of Tamil "Eelam" in the north and east. In Colombo, members of the Tamil community are at risk of arbitrary arrest and detention. Large numbers of Tamils are regularly arrested there during cordon and search operations, particularly following LTTE attacks. Though most of those arrested in these round-ups are released once their identity has been checked, those suspected of links with LTTE are held for longer and are likely to be tortured. Young Tamil men originally from the north or east of the country are especially at risk.

Sri Lanka acceded to the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) in 1994, and torture has since been made a criminal offence. However, under current legislation, the security forces have broad powers of arrest and detention. These wide powers have contributed to the prevalence of human rights violations, including torture. Torture has also been facilitated by widespread impunity of the

perpetrators. To date, no member of the security forces has been brought to justice for committing torture.

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

- expressing concern at recent reports of torture at several places of detention in Colombo, including Mirihana and Kotahena police stations and the headquarters of the Crime Detection Bureau (CDB);
- urging the authorities to undertake full and immediate investigations into these reports and take the necessary steps to bring the perpetrators to justice;
- urging the authorities to grant Sri Ram, Anthonipillai Binoth Vimalraj and Sivagnanasunderam Sri Kanthan access to any medical treatment they may require, and to their families and lawyers.

APPEALS TO:

President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga
Presidential Residence, "Temple Trees", Colombo 3, SRI LANKA

Telegrams: President Kumaratunga, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Faxes: + 94 1 33 37 03

Salutation: Your Excellency

Inspector General of Police Lakshman Kodituwaka
Police Headquarters, New Secretariat, Colombo 1, SRI LANKA

Telegrams: Inspector General of Police, Colombo, 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 19 October 1999.