

PUBLIC

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EXTRA 151/99

Fear of "Disappearance"

29 October

**SRI LANKA** Seenithamby Sathasivam (42)  
Somanathan Panchchadcharam (51)  
**S. Velautham (56)**

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Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of the three Tamil men named above. The men, reportedly arrested by Sinhalese home guards on 8 October 1999, have since "disappeared". Witnesses report that they were handed over to security forces' personnel, possibly the army, but the army denies they are in their custody.

The arrests took place at Sinnawathai, a Tamil border village in the eastern Batticaloa district. The men had been living there with a number of other Tamil families after being displaced from the village of Malayarkaddu following tension between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities in the area.

A member of parliament has raised concern about their "disappearance" with the Committee against Undue Harassment and Arrest, which has reportedly asked the Inspector General of Police and the Army Commander to investigate the case. The Committee was appointed by President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga in 1998 to investigate human rights violations. The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka has reportedly also investigated their "disappearance". The results of these inquiries have not yet been made public.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Tensions between Tamil and Sinhalese communities in the border areas between Batticaloa and Amparai heightened following the killing, on 18 September, of more than 50 Sinhalese civilians by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in three villages in Amparai district. The LTTE are fighting against the security forces for an independent Tamil state in the north and east of the country.

The Sinhalese and Muslim communities in the areas bordering the north and east were first supplied with arms for their protection in 1990. This followed widespread attacks by the LTTE, including attacks on worshippers in two mosques. The "home guards", however, have often acted outside of the command and control structures of the security forces by resorting to widespread reprisal killings, abductions and other human rights violations against Tamil civilians.

The United Nations Working Groups on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID), which is visiting Sri Lanka this week, recommended, following visits in 1991 and 1992, that the home guards be brought under stricter control. In the past five or so years, human rights violations by the home guard, although no longer so frequent, continue to be reported from time to time.

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

- expressing concern for the three Tamil men named above who have not been seen since reportedly being arrested by Sinhalese home guards in the Sinnawathai area on 8 October 1999;
- urging that an independent and impartial investigation into their whereabouts be undertaken, that the findings be made public and that those responsible be brought to justice;
- urging that, if they are in detention, they be promptly charged with a recognizable criminal offence, or immediately released.

**APPEALS TO:**

President

Her Excellency 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**

Army Commander

Lieutenant-General Sri Lal Weerasooriya

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 25 November 1999.