

Public statement

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Sri Lanka: Amnesty International condemns indiscriminate attack

Amnesty International condemned the indiscriminate killing of at least 20 civilians at Muttur, in Trincomalee district Sri Lanka, earlier today. The civilians, all of whom are reportedly members of the Muslim community, were killed when a suicide bomber thought to be a member of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) attacked Mohammed Lathif Baithullah, a candidate for the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress after he addressed a crowd at an election rally in the village late this afternoon.

Mohammed Lathif Baithullah, who is also a police officer, was killed and so were his bodyguards. But the large majority of those killed were civilians and it is clear that their killing was in violation of international humanitarian law, Amnesty International said in a fax to Anton Balasingham, the most senior representative of the LTTE currently based in London.

Amnesty International sought assurances from the leadership of the LTTE that it will not authorize or tolerate the deliberate or indiscriminate killing of civilians by forces under its control, and that LTTE forces abide by the basic principles of international humanitarian law, in particular, the provisions of Article 3 common to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and their Additional Protocol II relating to the protection of civilians and non-combatants. These principles clearly prohibit the killing of anyone who is not taking a direct part in hostilities.

Background

This attack took place in the context of electioneering for parliamentary elections scheduled for 10 October and ongoing fighting between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan army in the northern Jaffna peninsula. The

LTTE is fighting for an independent state called "Tamil Eelam" in the north and east of the country.

Since the start of the election campaign in early September, there have been daily reports of inter-party rivalry, resulting in at least 13 deaths so far. The majority of these killings have been attributed to supporters of the People's Alliance and other mainstream parties.

Today's attack is reminiscent of the attacks on the eve of presidential elections in December 1999 when LTTE suicide bombers detonated themselves among crowds attending election rallies for President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga and another one for the opposition United National Party's candidate, Ranil Wickremasinghe.

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