

AI INDEX: ASA 37/30/99  
7 December 1999

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

### **Sri Lanka: Probe into "disappearances" must inspire confidence**

Recent developments in Sri Lanka have reinforced the need for an independent commission to investigate the "disappearance" of hundreds of people arrested by the army in Jaffna in 1996, Amnesty International said today.

"The international community is waiting to see how the government deals with human rights violations, committed under both the previous regime and the present one," Amnesty International's Secretary General Pierre Sané said, in a letter to President Chandrika Kumaratunge, asking her to set up such a commission.

As a preliminary step, the government should make public the findings of an internal investigation by the Ministry of Defence into "disappearances" in Jaffna in mid-1996, Mr Sané said.

The Defence Ministry's Board of Investigation has reportedly informed relatives of the "disappeared", in letters sent out last week, that it cannot establish the fate, or whereabouts, of 374 people arrested by the army in mid-1996, out of more than 700 cases probed.

The human rights organisation pointed out that unless the Board's findings are made public, it will be difficult to verify them. "It is important that this be done since it is already clear that some of the findings do not inspire public confidence," Amnesty International said.

Relatives have been told that the fate of at least two of the "disappeared" is not known, even though their bodies were among those exhumed and identified in June this year at Chemmani in Jaffna, the organisation pointed out.

Amnesty International also urged the Sri Lankan government to seek international expertise in forensic criminal investigation to help bring to justice the killers of those whose remains have recently been exhumed by the authorities. The United Kingdom, the United States and Australia have shown interest in providing such assistance.

Amnesty International had sent international experts to Chemmani to be present during the exhumations of the remains of 15 people in September this year, and their analysis in October. These experts concluded that a pattern of injuries had emerged, making it easier to identify the perpetrators of these crimes.

"By seeking international expertise, and by developing its own facilities for advanced forensic work, including DNA testing, the Sri Lankan government can speed up this process," Amnesty International said.

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