

UA 348/90

"Disappearances"

6 February 2015

SRI LANKA; Father Eugene Hebert
 Bertram Francis

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Father Eugene Hebert was travelling on a red scooter from Valaichchenai to Batticaloa on 15 August 1990, with a pillion passenger, Bertram Francis. They were seen about 12 - 15 miles northwest of Batticaloa at about 8.30am by a Red Cross worker. They did not reach their destination, and both men are missing. It is feared that they may have been detained or killed by members of the Sri Lanka Army who had checkpoints at regular intervals along the road at the time. Representations made to the local army commander to investigate the fate of Father Eugene Hebert and Bertram Francis have brought no results.

The road on which Father Hebert and Bertram Francis were travelling was reportedly deserted, except for the army checkpoints. It is believed impossible that soldiers on the road at the time did not see them.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Father Eugene Hebert is an American Jesuit missionary priest who has worked in eastern Sri Lanka for the past 41 years. He is Director of the Eastern Technical Institute in Batticaloa, where his passenger, Bertram Francis, was a student. Father Hebert was active on behalf of the Batticaloa Peace Committee, and since June 1990 had made regular representations to the security forces on behalf of people in the area who had "disappeared".

In the immediate area of Batticaloa, some 400 people have reportedly "disappeared" following detention by the army since June, when the army regained control of the town from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Some are believed to have been released, but many are feared to have been killed. Piles of burnt bodies have appeared in various places overnight, when only the security forces are likely to be out on the roads.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern at reports that Father Eugene Hebert and Bertram Francis have "disappeared", and that they may have been killed by the security forces;
- urging that a full, independent inquiry be held to establish the fate of Father Eugene Hebert and Bertram Francis, which would include questioning of all soldiers on duty at checkpoints between Valachchenai and Batticaloa on the morning of 15 August 1990;
- saying that the results of such investigation should be made public, and that action should be taken to bring to justice any person who may have committed a crime in connection with the "disappearances" of Father Eugene Hebert and Bertram Francis.

APPEALS TO

His Excellency President R Premadasa
Presidential Secretariat
Republic Square
Colombo 1
Sri Lanka

Telegrams: President Premadasa, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Telexes: 22650 PRESEC CE

The Hon Ranjan Wijeratne
Minister of Plantation Industries and Minister of State for Defence
Ministry of Defence
Colombo
Sri Lanka

Telegrams: Minister Defence, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Telexes: 22229 MINDEF CE

Lieutenant General Hamilton Wanasinghe,
Commander in Chief of the Sri Lanka Army
Flower Road
Colombo 7, Sri Lanka

Telegrams; Army Commander-in-Chief, Wanasinghe, Colombo, Sri Lanka

COPIES TO; diplomatic representatives of Sri Lanka in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 16 October 1990.