

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

SRI LANKA

**Dr Kasippillai Manoharan, medical doctor
His family**

Dr Manoharan, whose son was killed in January, allegedly by the security forces, has received death threats, believed to be from the security forces. He and his family, who live in Trincomalee town in the east of the country, are now in fear for their lives. There are grave concerns for their safety.

Dr Manoharan's son, 20-year-old Ragihar Manoharan, was among five Tamil students killed by the Sri Lankan security forces in Trincomalee on 2 January. A group of students from Sri Koneswara Hindu College and St. Joseph's College in Trincomalee had gathered for a chat at about 7pm near the seafront, when a grenade was thrown at them from a passing auto rickshaw. The students ran, but at least three of them were injured in the explosion. A short while later a group of 10 to 15 officers in uniform believed to be police from the elite Special Task Force (STF) arrived. They put the injured students into their jeep and beat them with rifle butts, and then pushed them out onto the road. According to a witness the security forces personnel then shot five students dead, including Ragihar Manoharan. Although the security forces initially claimed the five had been killed when the grenade (which they alleged the students had been carrying) exploded, a post mortem later revealed that the five students had died from gunshot wounds. Three of them had been shot in the head.

An inquest was held at the Trincomalee Magistrates' Court on 10 January, at which Dr Manoharan gave evidence. That night, the family heard shouting outside and their house was pelted with stones. Dr Manoharan also received a number of anonymous phone calls that night, and on several subsequent nights, from a man who, speaking Sinhalese (the language of the majority of the population) interspersed with a few words of Tamil (Dr Manoharan and his family are Tamil), told him that he and his family would be killed, because he had given evidence at the inquest.

Dr Manoharan was one of several witnesses who gave evidence to the Magistrates' Court the following week. A Sinhalese police officer who attended court reportedly called the witnesses "*kottiyas*" (tigers) meaning members of the armed opposition group Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

A few days after the court hearings a man came to the family home on a motorbike, wearing a helmet, so that his face could not be seen, and asked to see Dr Manoharan. When Dr Manoharan's wife – who is also a doctor – offered to give medical help, the motorbike rider insisted on seeing Dr Manoharan and when he realised this was not possible, he went away.

Since the family believe that the death threats and harassment have been initiated by the security forces who suspect them of having links with the LTTE, they are living in fear for their lives. Dr Manoharan has temporarily suspended his medical practice and his children are no longer attending school.

Dr Manoharan has notified the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (sent by Norway, Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Sweden to monitor the ceasefire between the government and the LTTE), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the UN High Commission for Refugees and the National Human Rights Commission of the threats to kill him and his family.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In February 2002 the government and the LTTE entered into a Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) and held a series of peace negotiations, with the Norwegian government acting as facilitator. These broke down in April 2003 when the LTTE pulled out of the talks. Four years later, the government and the LTTE met in Geneva on 22 and 23 February to discuss the implementation of the CFA. Both sides agreed to uphold the commitments made in the CFA, and to meet again in April. However, since then the LTTE has put off holding further talks indefinitely citing logistical and security considerations.

Bombings and other violence over the last month have killed at least 200 people. On 25 April a suicide bombing in Colombo critically wounded Army Commander Lt. Gen. Sarath Fonseka and killed 10 other people. In retaliation the army launched air strikes on LTTE positions in Trincomalee District, in which at least 12 people were reported to have been killed. The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission declared that the strikes were a breach of the CFA.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing grave concern at reports that Dr Manoharan and his family have received death threats;
- expressing concern that Dr Manoharan may have been targeted because he is an important witness in the inquest into the 2 January killing of five students, including his son, in Trincomalee;
- reminding the authorities to their obligation to protect witnesses, such as Dr Manoharan, in order to uphold the integrity of official legal proceeding in which questions of impunity are at stake;
- urging the authorities to take immediate action to end the death threats and harassment of Dr Manoharan and his family, and guarantee their safety;

APPEALS TO:

President Mahinda Rajapakse
Presidential Secretariat
Colombo 1, Sri Lanka

Fax: +94 11 2333703
+94 11 2446657

Salutation: Dear President Rajapakse

Mr Palitha Kohana
Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process
Level 10, West Tower
World Trade Centre
Bank of Ceylon Mawatha
Colombo 1, Sri Lanka

Fax: +94 11 5554473
Salutation: Dear Mr Kohana

Mr Gotabhaya Rajapakse
Secretary, Ministry of Defence
Ministry of Defence
15/5 Baladaksha Mawatha
Colombo 3, Sri Lanka

Fax: +94 11 2430590
Salutation: Dear Defence Secretary

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 14 June 2006.