

URGENT ACTION

FOUR DOCTORS RELEASED, ONE STILL IN DANGER

Four of the five doctors held under emergency regulations by the Sri Lankan government for providing "false information" to foreign journalists have been released on bail. However, Dr S. Sivapalan is still detained without charge, and is at risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

Dr Veerakkathipillai Shanmugarajah, Dr Thurairaja Varatharaja, Dr Thangamuttu Sathyamoorthy and Dr Kathirvel Ilancheliyan Vallavan were released on bail on 24 August. Colombo chief magistrate Nishantha Hapuarachchi ordered their release on conditions that included reporting to the Vavuniya Police during the last week of every month. The four doctors are still in danger, because their case was so high-profile

The doctors had been in custody since 15 May, when they were detained at the Omanthai crossing point, for providing "false information" and what the government said were pro-Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) statements to international media outlets.

On 8 July the authorities held a press conference where the doctors, including Dr S. Sivapalan, retracted their earlier reports from the conflict zone. They said they had "exaggerated" the numbers of civilian casualties, as a result of pressure from the LTTE.

Amnesty International is concerned about how genuine these "confessions" were, given the doctors' prolonged detention; their vulnerability to torture and other ill-treatment by Sri Lankan officials, who have a record of mistreatment of detainees and witnesses. There are contradictions between the doctors' recent public statements and independently verified facts.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in English, Sinhalese, Tamil or your own language:

- Expressing concern for Dr.Sivapalan, who has been detained without charge since 15 May, and calling on the authorities to release him immediately, unless he is to be charged with a recognisably criminal offence;
- Calling on the authorities to ensure the safety of the released doctors (naming them).
- Calling on the authorities to repeal or revise emergency regulations and other special security legislation so as to bring them into line with international human rights law and standards.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 8 OCTOBER 2009 TO:

His Excellency the President Mahinda
Rajapaksa
Presidential Secretariat
Colombo 1
Sri Lanka

Fax: +94 11 2446657

Salutation: Your Excellency

Gotabhaya Rajapaksa
Secretary of Defence
Ministry of Defence, Public Security,
Law and Order
15/5, Bauddhaloka Mawatha,
Colombo 03, Sri Lanka

Fax: +94 11 254 1529

Salutation: Dear Mr Rajapaksa

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the third update of UA 129/09. Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA37/011/2009/en>

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Additional Information

Many parties in Sri Lanka have been implicated in violence against perceived opponents and critics, including assassinations of witnesses and enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings of individuals recently released from detention. High profile nature of doctors' case increases their vulnerability to potential violence and their need for protection.

Further information on UA: 129/09 Index: ASA 37/020/2009 Issue Date: 27 August 2009

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