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New video evidence of alleged Sri Lankan war crimes requires UN investigation

Video footage allegedly showing evidence of war crimes by Sri Lankan soldiers in the closing days of the war against members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) underlines the need for an independent investigation by the United Nations, Amnesty International said today.

Footage aired this evening by the UK's Channel 4 News television, allegedly reveals new details about the location, date and time of the events, the military units involved in the incident and the identity of at least one victim. The Channel 4 video was allegedly filmed in northern Sri Lanka in May 2009 and appears to show Sri Lankan soldiers executing prisoners. A portion of the five-minute video was aired last week, but the remainder was considered too graphic. Channel 4 released a similar, but shorter, video segment in August 2009.

"The video footage seen in full is extremely disturbing and includes what appears to be a number of naked male and female bodies, many of them blindfolded and bound, depicting what seems to be cold blooded execution of prisoners – if true, this would constitute a war crime," said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific programme director. "The Sri Lankan authorities have categorically rejected this and previous videos as fraudulent and dismissed out of hand reports that its forces engaged in war crimes. This position is increasingly difficult to defend. An investigation must be undertaken to explore alleged war crimes by all sides in the conflict."

Channel 4 has identified one of apparent victims as Shoba, alias Isaipiriya, a young Sri Lankan Tamil woman and LTTE media worker whose body was featured in video footage first aired on 30 November. Amnesty International has received independent confirmation about the identity of the dead woman.

"The addition of key details, such as the location and time that these images were captured, are a significant development," said Sam Zarifi. "The identification of victims such as Shoba, and the fact that her location immediately before she was killed, and the approximate time and date of her death, can apparently be determined, makes it considerably harder to discount this evidence."

The Channel 4 footage also included audio material containing graphic sexual remarks apparently made by soldiers discussing the dead women.

On June 21, 2009, Sri Lanka's Ministry of Defence released a list of names of LTTE leaders it said were killed on May 18, 2009 – the final day of the war. According to the Ministry of Defence, among the dead was a "Lieutenant Colonel Issei Piriya" of the LTTE's Communications and Publicity Wing, killed by the troops of the 53rd Division.

Channel Four says it has confirmed that the video footage was time stamped May 18.

"Since the Sri Lankan government is unwilling to initiate an impartial investigation of its own forces or

ensure accountability, this responsibility must now be assumed by the United Nations,” said Sam Zarifi. “The growing evidence that war crimes have been committed underscores the need for clear and credible answers to these deeply disturbing questions.”

Note to editors:

The Channel 4 News footage can be found at:

<http://www.channel4.com/news/sri-lanka-war-crimes-video-womans-body-identified>