

PUBLIC

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10 March 2006

UA 55/06 Fear for Safety/ possible "disappearance"

**SRI LANKA** **Kasinathar Ganeshalingam (m), aged 50, Director of the Tamils Rehabilitation Organization (TRO) and Co-ordinator of Pre-School Education Development Centre, North-East Province**  
**Kathirkamar Thangarasa (m), aged 43, TRO Driver**  
**Thanuskody Premini (f), aged 25, Chief Accountant for TRO in Batticaloa town and Student**  
**Shanmuganathan Sujendram (m), TRO Accountant, Mankikkavasar Children's Home**  
**Thambiraja Vasantharajan (m), TRO Accountant, Batticaloa**  
**Kailayapillai Ravindran (m), aged 26, TRO Accountant, Vipulananda Children's Home**  
**Arunesarasa Satheesharan (m), TRO Accounts Trainee, Vellavali**

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Kasinathar Ganeshalingam, Kathirkamar Thangarasa, Thanuskody Premini, Shanmuganathan Sujendram, Thambiraja Vasantharajan, Kailayapillai Ravindran and Arunesarasa Satheesharan, all employees of the Tamil relief and development charity, Tamils Rehabilitation Organization (TRO), were abducted in two separate incidents in late January 2006 in eastern Sri Lanka. It is feared that they may have "disappeared" and there are grave concerns for their safety.

On 29 January, Kasinathar Ganeshalingam, Kathirkamar Thangarasa and three female TRO employees were driving from the town of Batticaloa in eastern Sri Lanka, on their way north to the TRO headquarters in the town of Kilinochchi in northern Sri Lanka. According to two TRO workers who were later released, at about 8pm they saw a white Toyota Hi-Ace van following their vehicle. They were stopped and subjected to checks at the Sri Lanka Army checkpoint at Welikanda, on the borders of Batticaloa and Polonnaruwa districts, and saw the white van parked behind their vehicle. When they moved a short distance from the checkpoint, the white Hi-Ace van came behind them, overtook their vehicle and stopped them. An unknown number of armed men got out of the van and assaulted both Kasinathar Ganeshalingam and the driver, Kathirkamar Thangarasa, tied them up and dumped them in the back of the TRO vehicle. The TRO vehicle was then driven for about three hours and finally stopped at a camp in a jungle area at about 11.30pm. The five TRO staff members were held overnight in the camp. The women, who were reportedly held separately from their male colleagues, claim that they heard the two men being beaten by their captors. The following evening at around 9pm, two female staff members, Punniyamorthy Nadeswari and Sithiravel Sivamathi, were released, taken to the nearest main road and put on a bus by their abductors, who warned them not to speak to anyone about what had occurred. A third female TRO staff member, S Dosini, was released later. However, Kasinathar Ganeshalingam and the driver, Kathirkamar Thangarasa, are still missing.

Five more TRO employees apparently "disappeared" on 30 January in similar circumstances in the same area. At 4pm, 15 TRO staff members were travelling from the organization's Batticaloa District office to the town of Vavuniya to attend a training session, when their way was blocked by a white van approximately 100 metres after the Sri Lanka Army checkpoint at Welikanda. According to those who were later released, the white van had previously been following them. Five armed Tamil-speaking men, aged between 20 and 25, reportedly got out of the white van and boarded the TRO vehicle. One of them dragged the driver out of his seat and then drove the vehicle to a jungle area. All 15 of the captives were then blindfolded. Thanuskody Premini, Shanmuganathan Sujendram, Thambiraja Vasantharajan, Kailayapillai Ravindran and Arunesarasa Satheesharan were removed from the TRO vehicle and the remaining 10 were taken back to the main road and released. The released TRO workers reported that when one of the abductors shouted out that there was a police jeep ahead, another of the abductors replied that this would not present a problem to them.

Before the 10 TRO staff members were released, they were told by the abductors that they should prepare the funeral rites for the five remaining abductees.

The TRO has stated that it has filed police reports with the Batticaloa Police Station and some of the relatives of those missing have attempted to file police reports. Police took statements from the two young women who were released, who were kept overnight at the police station in Batticaloa. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) also investigated and took statements from the two women but have not to date made their findings public. The TRO staff have continued to cooperate with the authorities and the NHRC.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The government and the LTTE met to discuss the implementation of the cease-fire in Geneva on 22 and 23 February. The abductions of the TRO workers, which took place shortly after the two sides had agreed to meet, were interpreted by some as an attempt to derail this renewed effort to put the peace process back on track. However, the talks in Geneva went ahead as planned and both parties reiterated their commitment to respect the cease-fire agreement. They agreed to meet again in Geneva from 19 to 21 April.

The TRO is seen as being closely affiliated with the LTTE. However, it is a legally registered Sri Lankan charity and its mission is to provide much needed relief, rehabilitation and development for the people of the northeast of Sri Lanka.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the seven employees of the Tamils Rehabilitation Organization (TRO), who have been missing since their abduction in late January 2006;
- urging the authorities to undertake and complete as a matter of urgency thorough investigations into the fate and whereabouts of the seven, and make the findings public;
- calling on the authorities to bring those found responsible to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate measures to ensure the safety of all TRO workers and others involved in humanitarian relief work, in accordance with their wishes;
- calling for immediate steps to be taken to ensure the safety of the families of the seven missing TRO workers, in accordance with their wishes.

## **APPEALS TO:**

President Mahinda Rajapakse  
Presidential Secretariat, Colombo 1, Sri Lanka

**Fax: + 94 11 2333703**

**Salutation: Dear President**

Major General Asoka K Jayawardhana  
Secretary, Ministry of Defence, 15/5 Baladaksha Mawatha, Colombo 3, Sri Lanka

**Fax: + 94 11 2446300 / 2541529**

**Salutation: Dear Secretary of Defence**

Mr Chandra Fernando  
Inspector General of Police, Headquarters, New Secretariat, Colombo 1, Sri Lanka

**Fax: + 94 11 2 438 915**

**Salutation: Dear Inspector General**

## **COPIES TO:**

Lt Gen Sarath Fonseka  
Army Commander, Army Headquarters, Flagstaff Street, Colombo 1, Sri Lanka

**Fax: + 94 11 2855018/ 2434862/ 2338653/ 2421374**

and 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 21 April 2006.