

EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 37/09/97

UA 82/97

Rape / Fear for safety

21 March 1997

**SRI LANKA** Velan Rasamma (34)

**Velan Vasantha (28)**

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Velan Rasamma, a widow, and her sister, Velan Vasantha, were allegedly raped by four soldiers at their home in Mayilampaveli Colony, Batticaloa district, on 17 March 1997. The soldiers, from the Mayilampaveli army camp, reportedly forced their way into their home around 11pm and took the women outside. There, they raped them repeatedly.

Both women made a complaint to the local police at Eravur. A medical examination was carried out on the women at the local hospital on 19 March. A further complaint was made to the local Joint Operations Commander who promised to take action. However, to date no action appears to have been taken against the alleged perpetrators.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

In the context of the armed conflict between the security forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the main armed opposition group fighting for a separate state in the north and east of Sri Lanka, there have been continuing reports of arbitrary arrests and detention, torture, including rape, "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions.

In September 1996, the rape and death of a 18-year-old student who "disappeared" after she was stopped at a sentry point at Kaitadi, Jaffna district created widespread public protest in Sri Lanka. Her mother, brother and neighbour had gone missing on the same day after they made inquiries at the sentry point. Their bodies were found approximately 6 weeks later. Post-mortem investigations found evidence of rape on the girl's body. Amid public outcry, eleven members of the security forces were arrested in connection with this case and legal action against them is pending.

However, in less prominent cases reported from other parts of the north and east, such as several cases reported from Batticaloa district in early 1997, the initial investigations have not resulted in any effective legal action against the alleged perpetrators. In those exceptional cases where perpetrators have been brought to trial, victims of rape have failed to appear in court because of fear for their lives.

#### **RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:**

- expressing concern at reports of the rape of Velan Rasamma and her sister, Velan Vasantha, at Mayilampaveli Colony, Batticaloa district, on 17 March 1997;
- urging that immediate action be taken against the alleged perpetrators;
- urging that protection be provided to the women to ensure that the alleged perpetrators cannot put pressure on them to withdraw their complaint to the police.

#### **APPEALS TO:**

Her Excellency President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga  
Presidential Residence  
"Temple Trees"  
Colombo 3, Sri Lanka

**Faxes: + 94 1 33 37 03**

**Telegrams: President Kumaratunga, Colombo, Sri Lanka**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

The Hon (General) Anuruddha Ratwatte

Deputy Minister of Defence

Ministry of Defence

15/5 Baladaksha Mawatha

Colombo 3, Sri Lanka

**Faxes: + 94 1 54 15 29 or 68 77 68**

**Telegrams: Deputy Defence Minister, Colombo, Sri Lanka**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

Lt-General Rohan Daluwatte

Army Commander

Army Headquarters

Flagstaff Street

Colombo 1, Sri Lanka

**Telegrams: Army Commander, Colombo, Sri Lanka**

**Salutation: Dear Army Commander**

Inspector General of Police

Police Headquarters

New Secretariat

Colombo 1, Sri Lanka

**Telegrams: Inspector General of Police, Colombo, Sri Lanka**

**Salutation: Dear Inspector General**

**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 2 May 1997.