

URGENT ACTION

STUDENTS AT RISK OF TORTURE FOLLOWING MARCH

Four students were arrested on 1 December in Jaffna, northern Sri Lanka, by the Terrorist Investigation Division (TID) of the police. They are being held in Vavuniya for interrogation and are at risk of torture.

P. Tharshananth, Sanmugam Solaman, Kanesamoorthy Sutharsan and K. Jenemajeyamenan were arrested without warrants in Jaffna. It is not known if they have been formally charged. Sri Lankan media reports that they are being questioned about their alleged involvement in a petrol bomb attack on the office of a local political organisation, as well as their involvement in organising demonstrations. There are concerns for their well-being given evidence of the persistent use of torture in TID custody.

Their arrests come after several days of student protests following efforts by the security forces to suppress peaceful commemorations of Maaveerar Naal (Heroes Day), a day of remembrance established by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). On 27 November security forces broke up a lamp lighting ceremony at the women's hostel at Jaffna University, reportedly breaking lamps, threatening students and pointing weapons at them. The following day students responded with a silent protest and short march and held placards denouncing the restrictions on freedom of expression. At least 20 undergraduates were injured and beaten by riot police and officers in civilian dress, including Sanmugam Solaman. Security forces allege that the students had thrown stones at them, prompting them to react; university staff told local media that the event was peaceful until the authorities attacked the marchers.

Please write immediately in English or your own language:

- Expressing concern for the safety and wellbeing of the four students (naming them);
- Calling on the Sri Lankan authorities to release them from custody or charge them with a recognizable criminal offense and to try them promptly in a regularly constituted court with all internationally recognized safeguards provided;
- Urging them to ensure that the detainees are treated in accordance with international standards while in police custody, specifically urging that they are not tortured and are given full access to their lawyers, families, food, blankets and medical care where necessary;
- Calling on the Sri Lankan authorities to end restrictions on freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly;
- Urging them to halt attacks on religious gatherings and other commemorative activities, and bring to justice those who carry out such attacks.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 15 JANUARY 2013 TO:

Inspector General of Police

N K Illangakoon
New Secretariat, Colombo 1
Sri Lanka
Fax: +94 11 244 0440
Email: igp@police.lk

Salutation: Dear Inspector General

Defence Secretary

Gotabhaya Rajapaksa
Ministry of Defence and Urban
Development
15/5, Baladaksha Mawatha,
Colombo 03, Sri Lanka
Fax: +94 11 254 1529
Email: secdef@sltnet.lk

Salutation: Dear Defence Secretary

And copies to

Secretary

Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission:
No. 108 Barnes Place Colombo 07,
Sri Lanka
Fax: +94 11 268 9558
Email: sechrc@sltnet.lk

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

There have been a series of violent attacks on student activists in Jaffna, as well as efforts to prevent students from organizing. In October 2011 Subramaniam Thavapalasingham, President of the Jaffna University Students' Union was attacked by unidentified assailants wielding iron bars who accused him of supporting Tamil separatism; he blamed Sri Lankan military intelligence for the attack. In May 2012, P. Tharshananth was attacked in a similar way and was very badly beaten shortly before he was to address a remembrance event commemorating victims of the armed conflict that ended three years earlier.

Since the armed conflict between the Sri Lankan armed forces and the LTTE ended in May 2009, the Sri Lankan authorities have placed tight restrictions on events and religious observances held to commemorate and mourn war victims, particularly those held around 27 November, the LTTE's 'Heroes Day' which had been established to commemorate cadres killed during Sri Lanka's armed conflict and which falls on the day after late LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran's birthday. 27 November 2012 also coincided with the Hindu festival Karthikai Deepam, which involves the lighting of oil lamps, and the army reportedly prevented many Jaffna residents from lighting lamps to celebrate the festival.

P. Tharshananth is Secretary of the Jaffna University Students' Union; Sanmugam Solaman is a Science Faculty Student Union member; Kanesamoorthy Sutharsan is a medical student, and K. Jenemajeyamenan is President of the Arts Faculty Student Union.

Names: P. Tharshananth; Sanmugam Solaman; Kanesamoorthy Sutharsan; K. Jenemajeyamenan.
Gender m/f: m

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