

URGENT ACTION

CRACKDOWN ON STUDENTS SPREADS FURTHER

One student is believed to have been released on bail, but many more have been arrested. Several are held incommunicado, putting them at much greater risk of torture.

One of the four detained students, **Kaneshamurthy Sudarsan**, has been released on bail, according to local press. **P. Tharshananth**, **Sanmugam Solaman** and **K.Jenemajeyamenan** are still in Terrorist Investigation Division (TID) custody. They are not known to have been produced before either the Vavuniya or Jaffna Magistrate and their families have been given no written notification of their detention or the charges against them. Officials at the TID Office in Vavuniya refused to allow Sanmugam Solaman's parents to visit him, and told them that the students had been transferred to a "Rehabilitation" centre in Welikanda, a long way from Jaffna.

Local press quoted police as saying the students had been arrested in connection with their alleged involvement in a petrol bomb attack on the office of a local political organisation, as well as their involvement in organising demonstrations. However, faculty members with the Jaffna University Science Teachers' Association said in a letter to President Mahinda Rajapaksa on 7 December that the petrol bomb was only a pretext to detain and harass student leaders and that the students "had nothing to do with bomb throwing." They expressed opposition to the use of the Prevention of Terrorism Act against non-violent political activities and opinion.

On the morning of 6 December, a man claiming to be with the TID presented the University of Jaffna administration with a list of 10 students the university should hand over to the Jaffna Police Station, without giving any reason. The Dean of the medical faculty handed over five students to the authorities that day. A sixth student from the Management Faculty was handed over by his father; all six were interrogated, and released on 10 December. Three others surrendered to the Human Rights Commission on 7 December and later to the TID were also interrogated for several days and released. Student Union President **V. Bhavananadan** surrendered to the Human Rights Commission in Jaffna on 7 December and later turned himself in to the TID. His whereabouts are unknown.

Please write immediately in English or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to release the students or charge them with a recognizably criminal offence and to try them promptly in accordance with internationally recognized safeguards;
- Urging them to ensure that the detainees are treated in accordance with international standards, especially that they are not tortured and are given full access to their lawyers, families and any medical attention they may require;
- Calling on them to end restrictions on freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, including religious gatherings and other commemorative activities, and bring to justice those who attack such gatherings.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 22 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. This is the first update of UA 347/12. Further information:
<http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA37/014/2012/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The arrests came 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.

There have been a series of previous 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; and V. Bhavananadan is Jaffna University Student Union President.

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

Further information on UA: 347/12 Index: ASA 37/015/2012 Issue Date: 11 December 2012