

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: ASA 37/17/91
Distr: UA/SC

This appeal is being sent out as an EXTRA because for strategic reasons, it is felt that a limited number of appeals is more appropriate. The information in it is external but it will not be printed for distribution to the UA network, although it will go in the Weekly Mailing (for information only).

EXTRA 53/91

Death threats

19 August 1991

SRI LANKA: Villagers of Manchentoduvai, Batticaloa district

In mid-July, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the main Tamil armed opposition group, currently engaged in armed conflict with the Sri Lankan security forces in the northeast of the country, put up posters during the night in Kattankudi, a Muslim town in the east, ordering people to leave "or face the consequences". The organization, fighting for the establishment of a separate Tamil state - "Eelam" - in what is now the Northeastern Province, also sent letters to local mosques threatening members of the Muslim community to leave or face death.

On 15 August 1991, in an apparent reaction, several Muslim Home Guards, who have been provided with arms and training by the army, reportedly arrested four young Tamils from Manchentoduvai, a small community of *dhobbies* (washerpeople) on the border between Batticaloa town and Kattankudi. The four were reportedly beaten up and subsequently released with the message to the whole community to vacate the area within ten days or "we will know what to do".

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The present Northeastern Province of Sri Lanka consists of the former Northern Province and the former Eastern Province. While the first one is predominantly Tamil, the latter has almost equal numbers of Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims. Since the outbreak of the fighting between the Sri Lanka security forces and the LTTE in June 1990, tension between the Tamil and Muslim community particularly has increased. Hundreds of Muslim as well as Sinhalese villagers have been killed by the LTTE. In early August 1990, for instance, 103 Muslim worshippers were killed inside two mosques at Kattankudi. In retaliation, Muslim groups provided with arms by the government have killed Tamil villagers.

In October 1990, the LTTE issued an ultimatum to Muslims in Mannar, Mullaitivu, Kilinochchi and Jaffna districts to leave the area or be killed. An estimated 40,000 fled south to Puttalam and Colombo. Some fled to the east, where they now face further threats from the LTTE.

Amnesty International appreciates the difficulties faced by members of the Muslim community in the northeast of Sri Lanka. It has appealed to the LTTE to immediately halt human rights violations.

Amnesty International believes that, however great the provocation may be, all persons authorized by law to use force and firearms, such as the Muslim Home Guards, should be instructed at all times to act according to the law. It is appealing to the Sri Lankan authorities to take all necessary steps to guarantee the physical safety of the villagers of Manchentoduvai and immediately halt these threats, identify those responsible and bring them to justice.

page 2 of EXTRA 53/91

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern for the safety of the Tamil villagers of Manchentoduvai, Batticaloa district, after threats ordering them to vacate the area or face the consequences by armed Muslim Home Guards;
- stressing that you appreciate the difficulties faced by members of the Muslim community in the northeast of Sri Lanka, in particular the threats to Muslims from Kattankudi to leave their area;
- urging that, regardless of any provocation, all persons authorized by law to use force and firearms, such as the Muslim Home Guards, should be instructed at all times to act according to the law;
- urging that all necessary steps are taken to guarantee the physical safety of the villagers of Manchentoduvai and to immediately halt these threats against them;
- urging that investigations are held to identify those responsible and bring them to justice.

APPEALS TO

1.

His Excellency President R Premadasa **Dear President**
 Presidential Secretariat
 Republic Square
 Colombo 1, Sri Lanka

Telegrams: President Premadasa, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Telexes: 22650 PRESEC CE

Faxes: + 94 1 54 6657

2.

Brigadier Nalin Angamana **Dear Brigadier**
 Coordinating Officer
 Army Headquarters
 Batticaloa, Sri Lanka

Telegrams: Coordinating Officer Angama, Army HQ,
 Batticaloa, Sri Lanka

COPIES TO: to diplomatic representatives of Sri Lanka in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,

or your section office, if sending appeals after 2 September 1991.