

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Sri Lanka: Amnesty International concerned about escalation of violence

Amnesty International is appealing to all parties to halt the killings, abductions and “disappearances” being reported daily from the north and east of Sri Lanka.

Over one hundred people including around 40 civilians and 60 security forces personnel have been killed in a month of bloodshed.

Amnesty International is appalled by the news of the killing by unidentified attackers of Member of Parliament Joseph Pararajasingam, while he attended mass at St Mary’s Church, Batticaloa on Christmas Eve, said Purna Sen, Asia-Pacific Director at the organization.

This was followed soon after by the killing on 2 January of five high school students from Sri Koneswara Hindu College and St Joseph’s College in Trincomalee. Although the army first claimed they were killed by a grenade that the students were carrying, following a post mortem it was revealed that the students had been shot, three of them in the head. The President has ordered an inquiry into the killings.

Earlier, on 16 December, a young Tamil woman, Ilayathamby Tharshini, was raped and murdered in Punguduthivu and her body dumped in a well, near a Sri Lanka naval base. Amnesty International is very concerned about an increase in reports of the sexual abuse of women, said Purna Sen.

On 4 December a Sri Lankan government administrative officer, Mr A L M Faleel, from Kathankudy in the Eastern Province, was badly injured in a shooting allegedly carried out by the LTTE. He was taken to hospital in Colombo where he later died of his injuries.

Amnesty International is urging the government of Sri Lanka to institute independent and impartial inquiries into these killings and bring those responsible to justice. The organization is also appealing to the LTTE to abide by its commitments to uphold international humanitarian law.

At least ten people are reported to have “disappeared” following arrest by the security forces in northern Sri Lanka in the last two months. Amnesty International calls on the government to ensure full and impartial investigations into these reports of “disappearances” in order to prevent this heinous human rights violation re-establishing itself as a pattern in Sri Lanka.

In addition, the organization is extremely concerned at reports that at least 250 families have fled the Jaffna peninsula in the last few weeks, as the population fears a return to full scale war.

The deteriorating security situation will also drastically effect aid and relief operations to those displaced by

the tsunami and by years of conflict who see no hope of returning to their homes.

Background

Over the past six months there have been a number of efforts to put peace negotiations, suspended since April 2003, back on track. Both sides have agreed in principle to review the implementation of the cease-fire agreement, established in February 2002, but have stalled on agreement over a venue for talks. The Norwegian Special Envoy, Eric Solheim, is due to visit Sri Lanka on 23 January.

Tensions in northern Sri Lanka have escalated since early December 2005 with numerous killings, arrests, claymore and landmine explosions.

Emergency regulations currently in force allow for detention in police custody for up to 90 days. Hundreds of people were arrested in Colombo under these provisions during cordon and search operations conducted by the security forces at the end of December 2005. Most have been released after questioning, but 15 people are believed to be still detained.