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Public Statement

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Sri Lanka: Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch concerned at increased killings in East

(New York and London, July 26, 2004) -- Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch today expressed their serious concern at the spate of unlawful killings in and around Batticaloa since a faction led by former LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) eastern commander, Colonel Karuna, broke away from the LTTE in March 2004. Both organisations called on all parties operating in the region to respect human rights.

"All parties must immediately order a halt to these killings, which are reversing improvements in the human rights situation made since the ceasefire and creating a climate of fear," said Amnesty International.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have received reports of at least six unlawful killings in the east since 9 July, when a local government officer, Kunjithamby Sivarasa, was reportedly shot and killed at his home in the village of Ariyampathy. These include, on 21 July, the shooting of Velayutham Raveendran, a senior Eelam Peoples Democratic Party (EPDP) member and Chairman of the Alaiyadivembu Pradhesiya Sabha, at a bus stop in Akkaraipattu town.

In a particularly alarming case, the LTTE claimed responsibility for the public executions of Balasuntaram Sritharan and Thillaiampalam Suntararajan on 8 July at Illupadichchai junction. It is reported that their dead bodies were found blindfolded, with manacles around their ankles. The LTTE, through a statement released by the political wing of the Batticaloa-Amparai region, claimed responsibility for the killings, stating that the two men had been sentenced to death as "traitors", and called on all Tamils to identify any other such "traitors". These killings and the accompanying public appeal have served to further intimidate the local population.

In addition, Kanapathipillai Mahendran, known as 'Satchi Master', and Sarvanamuttu Shanthakumar, were reportedly shot and killed in Batticaloa prison by a fellow prisoner and LTTE cadre, on 14 July. A third person was also injured in the shooting. These killings follow accusations that 'Satchi Master' had been organising publicity for Colonel Karuna and his supporters from within the prison. The killings raise serious questions over the security and management of the prison, particularly when authorities know that members of rival groups are being held within the same building. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch urge the authorities to fully investigate how lethal weapons were allowed inside the prison, and to take all measures required to protect those in prison custody.

These killings are occurring at the same time as the establishment, within the LTTE Peace Secretariat, of the new *NorthEast Secretariat on Human Rights (NESHOR)*, which opened on 9 July. The stated intention of the NESHOR is to monitor and strengthen human rights in the north and east. "While the establishment of a human rights secretariat is an encouraging development, the LTTE must show by direct example, rather than words alone, that its stated commitment to human rights is more than window

dressings", said Human Rights Watch.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are calling on the LTTE, government authorities and the Norwegian-led Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) to act in accordance with their responsibilities in order to end these killings and bring those responsible to account. The killings should be investigated by the police, who maintain overall responsibility for law and order, and by the SLMM, within their mandate to investigate breaches of the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch particularly urge the LTTE to abide by its stated commitments to respect human rights and minimum humanitarian standards, as reiterated by S. P. Tamilselvan, Head of the LTTE Political Wing, at the opening of the NESHOR. Minimum humanitarian standards, as contained in Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, prohibit violence to life and person, the taking of hostages and summary executions of those not actively engaged in the conflict.