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2007 Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders from Burundi and Sri Lanka

Pierre Claver MBONIMPA, a policeman-turned-human-rights defender in Burundi, and Sri Lankan professors, **Rajan HOOLE and Kopalasingham SRITHARAN**, who are monitoring violations by all warring parties, will receive the 2007 Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders (MEA) on **Tuesday 2nd October 2007**.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights will present the award during a ceremony at the Bâtiment des Forces Motrices in Geneva starting at 18h00. The 2nd of October is the International Day of Non-Violence and the ceremony of the MEA takes place within a special evening devoted to Mahatma Gandhi by the International North South Media Festival. Two short portraits, filmed by award-winning Dutch film-maker Rob Hof, will be shown in premiere.

On behalf of the 10 international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who constitute the Jury of the MEA, the Chairman, Hans Thoolen, described the laureates as “key actors for human rights and democracy in their countries, where dramatic struggles for peace have made their work extremely risky”.

Pierre Claver MBONIMPA served as a policeman in Burundi until December 1994. He spent two years in prison on the basis of false accusations. Upon his release, he founded the Burundian Association for the Protection of Human Rights and Detained Persons (APRODH) to help protect the rights of prisoners. He has campaigned fearlessly against torture, and organized events where police and military representatives have had to face public questions from human rights activists and victims. He is often hailed as one of the few who stand up for the rights of Hutu, Tutsi and Batwa. He is outspoken about human rights violations, e.g. last February he denounced the mistreatment of detainees in holding cells by police and administrative officials, particularly in the interior of the country. His courage and work are becoming internationally recognized: he was requested to speak on Burundi on behalf of human rights organizations at the recent session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Rajan HOOLE and Kopalasingham SRITHARAN, co-founders of the University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR), have monitored and documented in regular reports the human rights abuses committed by the Sri Lanka Government and the Tamil Tigers (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam -- LTTE). At great personal risk they have reported on the effects of armed conflict on children, women, minorities and displaced persons over the past 18 years. Since the last upsurge in fighting, the UTHR has conducted groundbreaking investigations into the most serious atrocities, including the Trinco 5, the Mullaitivu bombing that killed some 51 young women and girls, and the execution-style slaying of 17 humanitarian aid workers. Often alone in exposing abuses by all parties, both men are under death sentences from the LTTE. Since the assassination of their colleague, Rajani Thiranagama, the two men have been forced to work underground for more than a decade, but their reports are well known in Sri Lanka and abroad.

A unique collaboration of 10 of the world's leading human rights organizations makes the MEA the main prize of the whole movement. The JURY is composed of the following: Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Human Rights First, International Federation for Human Rights, World Organization Against Torture, International Commission of Jurists, German Diakonie, International Service for Human Rights, Front Line and HURIDOCS.

Patrons of the Martin Ennals Award: Asma Jahangir, Barbara Hendricks, José Ramos-Horta, Adama Dieng, Leandro Despouy, Robert Fulghum, Theo van Boven and Werner Lottjet.

The **previous laureates** are: Akbar Ganji, Iran and Arnold Tsunga, Zimbabwe (2006); Aktham Naisse, Syria; Lida Yusupova, Russia; Alirio Uribe Muñoz, Colombia; Jacqueline Moudeina, Chad; Peace Brigades International; Immaculée Birhaheka, DR Congo; Natasa Kandic, Yugoslavia; Eyad El Sarraj, Palestine; Samuel Ruiz García, Mexico; Clement Nwankwo, Nigeria; Asma Jahangir, Pakistan; Harry Wu, China (1994).

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