

UA 152/00

Fear of torture / medical concern / death in custody 2000

SRI LANKA

Sinnathamby Pradeepan
Poopalaratnam Arulramesh
Gunasekaran Sathiyaseelan
Samithamby Eswaran
Ganesh Chandrakanthan (killed)

Police have arrested five young men on suspicion of involvement with the armed opposition group Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). One is known to have died in custody, and the others are believed to have been severely tortured.

The five labourers were arrested on 4 June in Trincomalee district, in the east of the country, and taken to Kantalai police station. The LTTE is fighting for an independent state, which it calls Eelam, in the north and east of Sri Lanka.

The men's parents tried to visit them the next morning, but police chased them away. The next day, Kantalai police were seen taking Poopalaratnam Arulramesh to his house, together with Sinnathamby Pradeepan. Both men appeared to have been badly tortured: Sinnathamby Pradeepan was bleeding from his mouth and had open wounds on his shoulders, and Poopalaratnam Arulramesh had difficulty walking.

In the morning of 7 June, police told Ganesh Chandrakanthan's family that he had been killed when he set off a grenade at the time of his arrest. The police refused to release the body unless his relatives signed a statement confirming that Ganesh Chandrakanthan was an LTTE member. The relatives refused, and the body is believed to remain at the Kantalai hospital mortuary.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Torture has been widespread in Sri Lanka for many years. Amnesty International has obtained many testimonies of torture, corroborated by medical certificates.

Many of the recent reports of torture are linked to the conflict between the security forces and the LTTE. The fighting in the northern Jaffna peninsula increased sharply in April this year, and since then there has been an increase in reports of torture, including reports from elsewhere in the country.

After this increase in violence, the government issued new Emergency Regulations on 3 May, under which the security forces have wider powers to arrest and detain suspects. A suspect may now be held in preventive detention for up to a year, without being produced before a court, on the orders of the Defence Secretary. Anyone arrested in connection with a possible offence against these regulations can be held for up to 90 days if arrested in the north or east of the country, or 30 days elsewhere, before being produced before a magistrate. Under the previous Emergency Regulations such suspects could be held for 60 and 21 days respectively. Suspects can also be held for up to 18 months under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. The increase in the maximum period of detention has put prisoners at greater risk of abuse in custody.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Sinnathamby Pradeepan, Poopalaratnam Arulramesh, Gunasekaran Sathiyaseelan and Samithamby Eswaran, who have reportedly been tortured in police custody at Kantalai, Trincomalee district;
- expressing concern that another man arrested with them is reported to have died in Kantalai police custody, and that police are refusing to release his body unless his relatives sign a statement confirming he is a member of the LTTE;
- urging the authorities to undertake full and immediate investigations into these reports and take the necessary steps to bring those responsible to justice;
- urging the authorities to grant the detainees access to any medical treatment they may require, and to their families and lawyers;
- expressing concern about the increased powers given to the security forces to arrest and detain suspects under the new Emergency Regulations.

APPEALS TO:

President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga

Presidential Residence, "Temple Trees", Colombo 3, SRI LANKA

Telegrams: President Kumaratunga, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Faxes: + 94 1 44 66 57

Salutation: Your Excellency

Inspector General of Police Lakshman Kodituwaka

Police Headquarters, New Secretariat, Colombo 1, SRI LANKA

Telegrams: Inspector General Police, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Faxes: + 94 1 43 89 15

Salutation: Dear Inspector General

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

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 20 July 2000.