

UA 29/99 Fear of Torture/Fear of "Disappearance" 23 February 1999

SRI LANKA Sivam Ashokumar (20)
 Arumugam Pakkiri (alias Jeya) (35)
 Two other men, names unknown

The men named above are believed to be held prisoner by the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), an armed Tamil group fighting alongside the Sri Lankan security forces. Amnesty International believes they are at risk of torture or "disappearance".

Sivam Ashokumar, a labourer from Cheddikulam Road, Sambaltotam, Vavuniya, was working by the roadside when PLOTE members came and took him away in a minibus, at around 11.30am on 24 January 1999. On 23 January, two PLOTE members had reportedly come to his home to kill him, but left when his neighbours protected him. The reasons for this attack are unknown. Shortly after he was taken away, his relatives made inquiries at the PLOTE camp in Kurumankadu, but PLOTE leaders apparently denied he was in their custody.

Arumugam Pakkiri (alias Jeya), a carpenter, came to Vavuniya from Mannar on 6 February. He was taken from the lodge where he had been staying at 9am on 7 February by members of PLOTE, who confiscated his identity card and those of two other people who had travelled with him, and then took all three men away. Later that day PLOTE members brought Arumugam Pakkiri (alias Jeya) to the house of a relative in Rambaikulam, Vavuniya and said that he was being taken into custody on suspicion of being a member of the LTTE. When his relatives made initial inquiries at the local PLOTE camp they were told that Arumugam Pakkiri (alias Jeya) was under investigation and could not be released.

Since then the relatives of both men have made inquiries at PLOTE camps in the area including Malar Malagai, "Lucky House" and Kovilkulam. PLOTE members have denied that the men are in their custody.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

PLOTE is one of several armed Tamil groups fighting alongside the security forces in the north and east of Sri Lanka, against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who advocate a separate Tamil State, "Eelam", in those areas. Amnesty International has repeatedly expressed concern that members of PLOTE are holding prisoners in unauthorized places of detention.

This has been an especially serious problem in Vavuniya. Between 27 October and 21 December 1998, Amnesty International received reports that PLOTE took seven people into custody (see UA 320/98 (ASA 37/28/98) and follow ups, ASA 37/02/99, ASA 37/03/99 and ASA 37/04/99). To date, four of these people remain unaccounted for.

The organization has welcomed the introduction by the government of measures to safeguard the welfare of detainees. These include making it an offence to keep a detainee in an unauthorized place; requiring that detainees be held only in official places of detention run by the security forces; and requiring that each arrest must be reported to the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRC) within 48 hours.

After several members of PLOTE and the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), another armed group cooperating with the security forces, were

killed in incidents in early February in the Vavuniya area, the army commander reportedly ordered members of these armed groups not to carry weapons. However, to Amnesty International's knowledge, no action has so far been taken to fully enforce several of the safeguards, particularly against the use of unauthorized places of detention.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the above-named people who have not been seen since they were taken into custody by members of PLOTE in the Vavuniya area;
- urging that the government provide immediate information about their whereabouts;
- urging that those held in unauthorized places are transferred to regular places of detention or released;
- urging that those responsible for their "disappearances" be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

Her Excellency President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga
 Presidential Residence
 "Temple Trees"
 Colombo 3, Sri Lanka

Telegrams: President Kumaratunga, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Faxes: + 94 1 33 37 03
Salutation: Your Excellency

The Hon (General) Anuruddha Ratwatte
 Deputy Minister of Defence
 Ministry of Defence
 15/5 Baladaksha Mawatha
 Colombo 3, Sri Lanka

Telegrams: Deputy Defence Minister, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Faxes: + 94 1 54 15 29 / 68 77 68
Salutation: Dear Minister

R K Chandrananda de Silva
 Secretary
 Ministry of Defence
 No 15/5 Baladaksha Mawatha
 Colombo 3, Sri Lanka

Telegrams: Secretary Defence Ministry, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Faxes: + 94 1 54 15 29
Salutation: Dear Secretary

Lt-General Sri Lal Weerasooriya
 Army Commander
 Army Headquarters
 Flagstaff Street
 Colombo 1, Sri Lanka

Telegrams: Army Commander, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Salutation: Dear Army Commander

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 5 April 1999.