

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 37/004/2001

UA 41/01

"Disappearance"

15 February 2001

SRI LANKA

Suppiah Sivalingam, aged 24

Suppiah Sivalingam, a 24-year-old internally displaced person, has reportedly "disappeared" after visiting a military post in Vavuniya town. Amnesty International is concerned for his safety.

On 12 January Suppiah Sivalingam and his family fled from the district of Kilinochchi, which is currently under the control of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who are fighting for an independent state in the north and east of Sri Lanka. The family crossed into government-controlled areas at Piramanalankulam, where they went through the registration formalities required by the security forces deployed at the checkpoint. The soldiers told Suppiah Sivalingam to report to the "Sanasa camp" in Vavuniya for further questioning before he could be issued a pass for internally displaced people.

As instructed, on 14 January Suppiah Sivalingam visited the camp. However, he did not return to his family afterwards, and has not been seen since. His relatives have made inquiries with the police and military authorities in the area, but they deny having Suppiah Sivalingam in their custody. It is feared that he may be held in a secret place of detention run by military intelligence personnel operating in Vavuniya town.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

For years, Vavuniya has housed tens of thousands of displaced people from the areas most affected by the armed conflict in Sri Lanka, including the "Vanni", an area north of the town which is largely under LTTE control.

An estimated 23,000 internally displaced people are currently accommodated at 12 "welfare centres" in the area. They are all required to obtain a pass relevant to their circumstances when they arrive in Vavuniya. There are 14 different types of passes in force in Vavuniya, each with different validity, eligibility and duration.

Security forces personnel and armed Tamil groups working alongside them play an active role in trying to identify possible LTTE members among the internally displaced population. There have been regular reports of torture and "disappearance" after they have taken people into custody. Many of the "disappeared" are suspected to have been tortured to death in illegal places of detention.

Until May 2000, it was a legal requirement that places of detention had to be designated and published in the official Gazette. After the introduction of new emergency regulations, that is no longer the case and detainees can now lawfully be held in unauthorized places of detention. Amnesty International is concerned that the removal of such safeguards have increased the possibility of prisoners being held in secret detention and tortured.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Suppiah Sivalingam, who "disappeared" after visiting Sanasa Camp in Vavuniya;

- urging the authorities to clarify his whereabouts;
- asking that if he is in detention, he is promptly charged with a recognizably criminal offence, or immediately released, and that he is allowed access to his family, lawyer and necessary medical care;
- urging that those responsible for his "disappearance" are brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

President Chandrika Bandaranaike
Kumaratunga
Presidential Secretariat
Colombo 1
Sri Lanka

Telegrams: President Kumaratunga, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Faxes: + 94 1 33 37 03

Salutation: Your Excellency

Lieutenant-General
Lionel Balagalle
Army Commander
Army Headquarters
Flagstaff Street
Colombo 1
Sri Lanka

Telegrams: Commander of the Army, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Faxes: + 94 1 43 26 82 or 43 26 85

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 29 March 2001.