

(fwd) Sri Lanka: The continuing spectre of "disappearances"

234
Bogdanov

Til: Christian Schønau

Overført

Fra: arnehans@post3.tele.dk på INTERNET 27-11-97 22.59

Til: organ-dk@amnesty.dk på INTERNET

Til: debat@berlingske.dk på INTERNET

Til: sfanba@ft.dk på INTERNET

Til: sfchsi@ft.dk på INTERNET

Til: drc@drc.dk på INTERNET

Til: dr@dr.dk på INTERNET

Til: danchurchaid@dca.dk på INTERNET

Til: lhoc@drc.dk på INTERNET

Til: inm på INDENRIGSMINISTERIET

Til: mmhc@drc.dk på INTERNET

Til: pol_red@online.pol.dk på INTERNET

Til: radioavisen@dr.dk på INTERNET

Til: antal@icenet.no på INTERNET

Til: niels_rohleder@information.dk på INTERNET

Til: jseeberg@post3.tele.dk på INTERNET

Til: nyhederne@tv2.dk på INTERNET

Til: vt@vt.dk på INTERNET

Til: tvik@stud.isv.uit.no på INTERNET

Til: redak@aasti.dk på INTERNET

Til: svane@radikale.dk på INTERNET

Til: rvroya@ft.dk på INTERNET

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Fra: Departementet Indenrigsministeriet

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SRI LANKA

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On Thu, 27 Nov 1997 10:05:34 -0500, Amnesty International

<amnesty@oil.ca> wrote:

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> Amnesty International delegation which visited Sri Lanka recently has
>concluded that of the 600-odd people who have "disappeared" in the last 18
>months after their arrest by the security forces, nearly all have died as a
>result of torture or been deliberately killed in detention.

>

> According to the human rights organization, there is no evidence to
>suggest that sanction for the "disappearances" came from the political
>leadership, but the Sri Lankan government reacted too slowly to
>well-documented reports of a rise in "disappearances" in the Jaffna
>peninsula during mid-1996. As a result, by the time the authorities
>acknowledged the reality of what was happening there, around 600 people had
>"disappeared", and hundreds more were victims of torture at the hands of
>the security forces.

>

> "Although we welcome the government's decision to make public reports
>into thousands of cases of "disappearance" from 1988-1994, and several
>other measures taken since coming to power to strengthen human rights
>protection, it is vitally important that the government addresses the
>underlying structures and practices in the security forces," Amnesty
>International said.

>

> According to the organization, the events of 1996 indicate the need

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>for an active approach to tackling the root causes of human rights
>violations in Sri Lanka -- the lingering sense of impunity among
>perpetrators and the legislation allowing for people to be detained
>incommunicado for long periods of time.

>
> "In the past, Sri Lanka became a country notorious for
>"disappearances" -- a country racked by the terrible anguish suffered by
>relatives who never knew the fate of their loved ones," Amnesty
>International said. "The government must seize the initiative now to ensure
> that nobody has to go through this harrowing ordeal again."

>
> The Sri Lankan government has taken some steps to clarify the fate of
>the "disappeared", establishing a Board of Investigation (BOI) to
>investigate around 760 complaints. The BOI to date has traced 180 of the
>"disappeared".

>
> "Disappearances" usually took place in reprisal for attacks on the
>military by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) armed opposition
>group -- for example the killing of more than 1,300 soldiers during an
>attack on Mullaitivu army camp in July 1996.

>
> The LTTE have also been responsible for gross human rights abuses in
>Jaffna and elsewhere, including indiscriminate killings of civilians during
> attacks on checkpoints or army patrols and summary executions of suspected
> informants.

>
> After the Mullaitivu attack, the army told villagers in the Navatkuli
>area to gather at a local school, where they were made to file past masked
>informants. After a night of severe beatings in the main army camp nearby,
>most of those detained were released, however 39 remain unaccounted for
>despite numerous requests for information made by their relatives.

>
> According to local people interviewed by Amnesty International, the
>bodies of some of the "disappeared" are dumped in disused wells and
>lavatories in or around army camps.

>
> One 21-year-old man told how he was arrested on the way to visit his
>grandmother in July 1996. He was beaten with a rifle, partially suffocated
>with a plastic bag, throttled with a cloth and then stabbed with a bayonet
>in his neck and head. Semi-conscious he felt someone slice two of his
>fingers off to steal his rings. When he regained consciousness he found he
>had been dumped in a latrine.

>
> Although the rate has dropped, Amnesty International continues to
>receive reports of "disappearances" in Jaffna, with around 41 cases in the
>first seven months of 1997, four of whom have been traced by the BOI. The
>organization believes that the lack of monitoring of the welfare of
>detainees has contributed to the high number of "disappearances", and is
>calling for presidential directives aimed at safeguarding the welfare of
>detainees -- such as "arrest receipts" to be issued whenever someone is
>taken into custody -- to be implemented fully.

>
>.../ENDS
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Arne Hansen

E-mail: arnehans@post3.tele.dk, Tlf. 98425542

Sønderjyllands Alle 35, 9900 Frederikshavn, DK

Hjemmeside: <http://home3.inet.tele.dk/arnehans>

