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AdvocacyNet
News Bulletin 108

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SRI LANKAN ADVOCACY GROUP CONDEMNS TAMIL EXPULSIONS, RED CROSS MURDERS

June 8, Colombo, Sri Lanka and Washington DC: The Home for Human Rights (HHR) a leading human rights advocacy group, has condemned the forcible expulsion of 376 Tamils from Colombo and the recent murder of two Red Cross workers.

Police began rounding up the Tamils from boarding houses in Colombo on Thursday, and bussing them to the north and east of the country. The Supreme Court intervened early Friday and stopped the expulsions, which have been widely criticized internationally as ethnic cleansing.

Describing the bussing, an HHR press release reported that “hundreds of people were given little time to pack their belongings before being packed onto buses without food, water, or any idea where they were going. The buses transported people to two towns, Vavuniya and Trincomalee, in the northern and eastern regions of the country. Both towns are enveloped in the ongoing conflict between the government and Tamil Tigers.”

Meanwhile, a second release by HHR has condemned the June 1 murder of Sinnarajah Shanmuganathan and Karthigesu Chandramohan, two aid workers with the Sri Lankan Red Cross Society (SLRCS). The two men were abducted at the Fort Train railway station in Colombo and taken away by men in a white van – the vehicle of choice for death squads in Sri Lanka. Their bodies were found the following day, 95 miles from Colombo.

Madeline England (Columbia University) who is volunteering with HHR this summer as a Advocacy Project Peace Fellow, described hearing about the abductions on television.

“The two workers were Tamil men who had been in the capital from the North for a workshop at the ICRC headquarters. Men claiming to be police took them from the Colombo train station as they were waiting to go back to their town, Batticaloa. Other SLCRS workers at the station protested the abduction, telling the abductors that the two men did not speak Sinhalese well and that one of them should accompany to translate.

“But the abductors said that wasn’t necessary. Just like that. No, a translator won’t be necessary. As though they already knew what they were going to do. As though the two men never had a chance.

“There was a silence while we were all transfixed by the screen and people quietly finished their lunch. It goes without saying that if Red Cross aid workers, who maintain careful neutrality so as to work with both sides of a conflict, are targeted, then these are precarious times for anyone involved in human rights work.”

- For Madeline England’s blogs visit <http://advocacynet.org/author/madeline/>

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