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AdvocacyNet  
News Bulletin 125

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## NEW PUBLICATION PROFILES THE NEEDS AND COURAGE OF TORTURE SURVIVORS IN SRI LANKA

August 6, 2007, Colombo, Sri Lanka: Any suspect unlucky enough to be detained in Sri Lanka's brutal conflict risks being hung upside down or by their thumbs, beaten with metal poles, burnt with cigarettes, have petrol poured over their heads and boiling water forced down their throats.

This is the unsavory image to emerge from a new publication on torture from the Home for Human Rights (HHR), a leading advocacy organization in Sri Lanka.

The first issue of "Torture Monitor" was published on Wednesday and "dedicated to survivors of torture in Sri Lanka and around the world."

HHR has been helping torture survivors to overcome their trauma and re-integrate back into society since 1987, and is currently dealing with a sharply increased workload following the renewal of fighting between the Sri Lankan Army and the Tamil Tigers. In the first six months of 2007, HHR treated 66 survivors, compared to 20 in the whole of last year.

The first issue of the Monitor profiles one 26-year-old Tamil farmer who was arrested in 1999 under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, questioned the next day and immediately tortured. Ten days later he was transferred to the Police Counter Subversive Unit, where he was again tortured for 12 days. Eventually, he went before the Sri Lankan High Court, which found him not guilty and ordered him released in February 2001.

According to the Monitor, the experience of torture left the man suffering from "heart pain, bodily pain, headaches and eye pain. After about one and half years of imprisonment he has lost his venture as a farmer and business."

The newsletter will come out every three months, and contain regular profiles of survivors, as well as news about torture from Sri Lanka and around the world. It will also promote HHR's program of rehabilitation, which has been recognized internationally and received support from the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture.

HHR's approach builds on the resilience and capacity of survivors, who are offered medical assistance, counseling and social support. Follow-up visits by HHR staff have found beneficiaries of the program employed in fishing, agriculture, tailoring and carpentry. This support, says the Monitor, is intended to be "sustainable" and also allow survivors to "live with dignity."

In addition to rehabilitation, HHR plans to submit victim summaries and profiles to the UN Committee Against Torture in Geneva, which monitors adherence to the UN Torture Convention

– ratified by Sri Lanka in 1994. Within Sri Lanka itself, HHR is supporting 48 cases before the Sri Lankan courts, and was able to secure the release of five individuals last year.

In one notable case, HHR went to court on behalf of a woman who was gang-raped by 12 police officers at a police station. She was subsequently awarded 250,000 Sri Lankan rupees (\$2,500), a large amount in Sri Lanka.

One contributor to the Monitor is Madeline England from Columbia University, who is volunteering this summer with HHR as a Peace fellow of The Advocacy Project (AP). Ms England blogged about her feelings after meeting torture survivors in one recent blog: "The unspeakable cruelty and humiliation that one human being can cause another is now imprinted on my mind and stays with me 24 hours a day. I feel guilty for taking a lunch break, checking my email."

But, as Ms England also writes in a later blog, "My favorite activity of all is listening to the survivors. When it all seems insurmountable, listening to someone who overcame the unimaginable is amazing and inspiring."

- Read [Madeline England's blog](#).