

HOME FOR HUMAN RIGHTS HELPS FAMILIES IDENTIFY HEADLESS BODIES IN SRI LANKA

AdvocacyNet
News Bulletin 75, July 20, 2006

Colombo, Sri Lanka: The Home for Human Rights (HHR) has helped three Tamil families to identify and reclaim the decapitated bodies of relatives found near the town of Avissawella, 35 miles east of Colombo.

Police discovered five bodies in a deserted area on April 28. Three of them were later identified as Santhanam Mahalingam, Kandiah Gunasingham and Sivasamy Sukumar. HHR persuaded family members who were afraid of reprisals to come forward.

The police initially barred some of the families from entering the police stations and morgues, but HHR was able to secure permits for them to identify the bodies. HHR's legal team then gained court orders for DNA testing, and secured the release of the bodies to family members.

HHR seeks to help all Sri Lankans regardless of ethnicity and is a partner of the Advocacy Project (AP). HHR became involved in the case after the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission asked HHR to give legal assistance to the families.

V.S. Ganesalingam, HHR's legal director, said he was concerned that the police have not started an investigation. "These killings are a signal for Tamils that anything can happen to them at anytime, anywhere in Sri Lanka."

Mr. Ganesalingam suggested two possible motives for the beheadings. One is that the men were killed in revenge for the recent assassination attempt on a Sri Lankan army general. It is also possible that the killings were associated with gang activity in the area, he said.

Police suspect the men were abducted from different areas around Colombo and then beheaded. Witnesses said they heard speeding vehicles near the area throughout the early morning of April 28.

Disappearances and extrajudicial killings around Colombo and the North and East of the island have risen sharply as the cease-fire between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sinhalese-dominated government has come under pressure. The LTTE pulled out of peace talks in April after the Sri Lankan government rejected plans for creating an interim government in the North.

AP has recruited Greg Holyfield from the University of Arkansas' Clinton School of Public Service, to intern with HHR and work on post-Tsunami rehabilitation and HHR's human rights program.

HHR is ready to assist anyone who has been a victim of human rights abuses in Sri Lanka.

- Read [Greg's blogs](#).