

SRI LANKAN ARMY ACCUSED OF NEW DISAPPEARANCES AS THE GOVERNMENT ENDORSES NEW UN DISAPPEARANCES TREATY

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July 5, 2006, Colombo and Washington, DC: The Sri Lankan army has been asked to explain ten new disappearances in the northeast of the country, suggesting that the long-running conflict may be entering another vicious phase.

The names of the ten presumed victims – all men - were submitted to the UN Working Group on Disappearances in Geneva last week by the Home for Human Rights (HHR), a prominent Sri Lankan monitoring group and partner of the Advocacy Project (AP).

The submission came as the new UN Human Rights Council concluded its first session in Geneva. In an important move the Council - which includes the Sri Lankan government - adopted the draft of a new international convention on disappearances that calls on states to outlaw and punish the practice.

The Sri Lankan cases concern ten men between the ages of 21 and 59 who were apparently arrested by army units near Jaffna in January and failed to return home. One of the men, Paramanathan Jeyaratnam, 27, was told to report to the Urelu army camp, and taken there by his mother-in-law. When his wife inquired later she was told that her husband had never been to the camp. Soldiers came later to her house and seized a mobile phone. Three army camps – Urelu, Meesalai and Velmpiray – are mentioned in the dossier.

Two of those reported disappeared, Thembayah Thamisiri and Kendepan Narayanamoorthy, work for the Danish Demining Group. According to witnesses, they were taken away in a white car in an area where the army was operating.

The UN working group was set up in 1980 in response to lobbying by relatives of the disappeared people in Argentina, but quickly found that the practice is very widely used by governments around the world. Sri Lanka has been asked to explain 12,278 cases since the beginning of the interethnic troubles in 1983 – second in number to only Iraq. 5,708 of the Sri Lankan disappearances are considered unresolved.

Still, the UN submitted no cases to Sri Lanka in 2005 and the HHR dossier is further proof that the ceasefire has now collapsed.

By submitting the dossier to the UN last week, HHR hoped to take advantage of Sri Lanka's election to the new 47-member UN Human Rights Council, which met for the first time in Geneva. Human rights groups lobbied hard to keep violating governments off the Council and have vowed to monitor the human rights performance of those elected.

One of the Council's last acts was to adopt the text of a new convention that declares disappearances to be a crime against humanity and calls on all states to outlaw and punish the practice. Although Sri Lanka joined the consensus, the Sri Lankan delegate complained that the convention excludes disappearances by non-state actors – a clear reference to the Tamil Tigers.

The Advocacy Project disseminates information regularly from its twenty partner organizations, including HHR. AP is also supporting HHR's efforts to rebuild civil society in six Tamil communities that were devastated by the 2004 Tsunami.

* For Greg's blogs visit:

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