



International Federation of Tamils
18 Rue des Paquis, 1201 Geneva, Switzerland
tel/Fax 00 41 22 7320 831 ift@bluewin.ch

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URGENT PRESS STATEMENT

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Save Tamil Captives

International Federation of Tamils, IFT, wishes to draw the attention of the International Community, IC, to the alarming rate of involuntary disappearances, capable of dragging the country to unredeemable doom. Ten Tamil civilians, all TRO staff-members, have been reported lost, in two separate incidents, while travelling from the eastern region of Batticaloa. Their names are now to be committed to the dreadful list of "Involuntary Disappearance", unless the International Community puts its foot down firmly and prevail on the President of Sri Lanka to produce them.

The first party left Valaichenai, in a vehicle around 7.00pm., on Sunday, 29 January for Kilinochchi, with five passengers including the driver. These TRO officers are experts in pre-school education. Their journey was through the government-controlled area, lined with a number of army checkpoints at which, purpose of travel and destination are declared. It was only when they did not attend a scheduled meeting at Kilinochchi in the morning on 31 January, their absence was noticed and by evening it was established beyond doubt that the team of three women and two men had disappeared.

However, it was the second incident that was brought to the attention of the world first. Twenty TRO officers, while passing through the army checkpoint at Welikande in Polonnoruwa district, had declared their destination as Vavuniya in the North and the purpose of travel as, a pre-advertised training course. Within one hundred metres after leaving the checkpoint, they were waylaid by a paramilitary group and severely assaulted. While five from them, were abducted by the assailants, the rest were allowed home to tell the tale. This happened around 2 pm., Monday, 30 January, in broad daylight and was quick to catch the eyes of the international media.

News about this second incident in which five Tamils, belonging to the TRO were abducted, has already created shock and fear among Tamils in the North-East. And now, with the news of another five Tamils, also belonging to the TRO, missing while travelling, while some have panicked, most are outraged.

IFT appeals to the International Community to act quickly and save the lives of the captives and the missing. If pressure is exerted on the President to force his armed forces and the paramilitary groups attached to them to produce the missing TRO officers, the lives of the ten may be saved. It looks like that by commission of censoring the LTTE and omission of

ignoring army excesses in all recent communique, the International Community has been vicariously responsible for encouraging the armed forces to act uncensored.

While on one hand, attempt by the Norwegian facilitator is succeeding in bringing the parties to the conflict to the negotiating table, the national extremist forces and the Buddhist chauvinistic forces, on the other, appear to be edging towards thwarting it. During the election campaign and even after the victory of Mahinda Rajapakse as President, his extremist colleagues have been clamouring for banning the TRO. Now with ten TRO hands vanishing within 24 hours, the extremist JVP and the JHU may have an explanation to give.

On behalf of the Tamils all over the world, IFT appeals to the International Community for appropriate action.

For Further contact.

ift@bluewin.ch
