



# Tamils Rehabilitation Organisation

410/112 Bullers Road, Colombo 07, Sri Lanka

Ph: +94 (0) 11 269 3254, 471 6575

Fax: 471 6576

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

31 January 2006

20:00 Sri Lanka Time

## UPDATES and CORRECTIONS/CLARIFICATIONS

Five (5) staff members travelling from the Batticaloa office to Vavuniya for an accounting workshop have been kidnapped by unidentified gunmen after passing through the Welikanda, (Polonnaruwa District) Sri Lankan Army Checkpoint at approximately 16:00 hours 30 January, 2006.

Fourteen (14) TRO Batticaloa staff members (10 women, 4 men) and a hired driver departed Batticaloa at approximately 14:00 hours in a hired van (vehicle number: 250-8993). The TRO staff vehicle had registered at the Welikanda army checkpoint and was continuing its journey when a “white van” that had been parked a “few meters” (as stated by one of the women who was released) away from the checkpoint. The “white van” forced the vehicle carrying the TRO personnel to stop approximately 100 meters past the GoSL Security Forces checkpoint on the A11 road.

Five (5) men, aged between 20 and 25 dressed in casual attire and carrying small arms, got out of the white van and entered the TRO vehicle. One of them dragged the driver out of the driver’s seat, dumped him into the back seat and started driving into the nearby surrounding jungle.

All the TRO personnel and the driver were blindfolded with the women’s shawls and had their hands tied by the men while inside the vehicle. The vehicle was stopped inside the jungle and all the TRO personnel were taken out of the van. The men were forced to sit under a tamarind tree and the women were given back their shawls.

The TRO personnel were interviewed for approximately 2 hours during which time they were abused physically and mentally. Eventually all the girls (9), except TRO Batticaloa Chief Accountant Thanuskody Premini (also currently a university student at Eastern University), were put back into the vehicle with the driver and started to take them back to the main road.

When they came to the main road one of the abductors shouted that there was a police jeep up ahead on the road. Another of the armed men replied that it was not a problem for them.

Ms. Premini and the 4 male staff members listed below were detained:

Shanmuganathan Sujendram (TRO Accountant, Manikkavasahar Children’s Home, Santhivelli)

Thambiraja Vasantharajan (Accountant, TRO Batticaloa)

Kailayapillai Ravindran (Accountant, Vipulananda Children’s Home, Palugamam)

Arunesarasa Satheesharan (Accounts Trainee, Vellavali).

Tuesday, 31 January 2006

2.30 pm

**The following is taken from a statement made by one of the women that were released by the abductors. For fears for her safety, she does not wish to be identified. This is a translation from the Tamil telephone interview.**

“A TRO vehicle was carrying fourteen (14) TRO accounts staff plus the driver from Batticaloa to Vavuniya. After making entries at Welikanda military check point, they proceeded another 100m further. A white van that was parked a few meters away from the check point started to follow and waylaid the TRO vehicle. 5 men (aged between 20 and 25) got from the white van and entered into the vehicle. One of them dragged the driver out and dumped him into the back seat, and started driving into the nearby surrounding jungle area.

All the captives were blindfolded and had their hands tied by the men inside the vehicle. They stopped the vehicle inside the jungle area and made all the men sit under a tamarind tree. They gave back the salwar scarfs which were used to blindfold to the girls. All the girls, except Miss Premini, were put back into the vehicle with the driver, and brought back to the main road. Miss Premini and the 4 male staff were kept behind. When they came to the main road one of the abductors shouted that there was a police jeep on ahead, to which another replied that it was not a problem for them. The abductors also suggested that the released persons should make arrangements for the last rites for the 5 people in their possession.

They were armed with pistols. While there were 5 men directly involved in the abduction and the interrogation of these TRO staff, there were an unknown number in the white van.”



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The armed gunmen told the driver and the 9 TRO women that they should return to Batticaloa and tell the families of the 5 people in their possession to make arrangements for their last rites.

TRO Kilinochchi and TRO Colombo were notified of these events late in the evening on 30 January 2006 and immediately contacted the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), ICRC, various human rights groups, international NGOs, Members of Parliament and other significant actors in the Sri Lankan peace process in Batticaloa, Colombo and worldwide.

TRO was informed that due to the fact that night had fallen none of the above mentioned agencies could journey to the area in question due to the prevailing security situation and concerns for their safety.

On the morning of 31 January 2006 TRO personnel in Batticaloa and Colombo filed statements and requests with the SLMM, ICRC, the Batticaloa Police, the office of the President of Sri Lanka and the media.



Picture 1: Thanuskody Premini