



Tamils Rehabilitation Organisation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Abducted TRO Aid Workers Believed Dead - Memorial service held by TRO

(**March 15 2007 - Kilinochchi**) Tamil Rehabilitation Organization Headquarters in Kilinochchi held a memorial ceremony on Wednesday March 14 2007 to honour the seven (7) TRO humanitarian aid workers who were abducted on 29 & 30 January 2006 from the Welikanda area in Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) controlled Polonaruwa District by the "Karuna Group", a paramilitary organization that is functioning with the protection of and in collaboration with the armed forces of the Sri Lankan government.

The 7 aid workers remain "disappeared" over a year after their abduction and, as a result of news reports and information conveyed to our organization, it is with great sorrow and condolences to the families that TRO now believes that our co-workers were executed soon after being abducted by the GoSL-affiliated "Karuna Group" paramilitaries. Recent news reports state that they were tortured before being murdered and their bodies disposed of. TRO requests that the Police follow up on news reports and investigate the locations where the bodies may be buried.

TRO President Mr. Sivanadiyar, speaking at the ceremony stated, "With respect to information on our abducted staff, though we received much information on their status from the beginning, we took much effort and time to ensure and confirm the truth of all the information. In the year since the abductions we have observed a day of fasting and conducted media events in Colombo to publicize and appeal to the Sri Lankan and international community for the release of the abductees. Based on the news that has been published in the Sri Lankan newspapers and based on the research we have performed, we now strongly believe that our staff have lost their lives."

The 7 who are missing and believed dead are:

Batticaloa

1. Mr. THAMIRAJA VASANTHARAJAN.
2. Mr. SHANMUGANATHAN SUJENDRAN
3. Mr. KAILASAPILLAI RAVINTHIRAN
4. Mr. ARULTHAVARASA SATHEESKARAN

Kilinochchi

1. Ms THANUSHKODI PREMINI
2. Mr. THANGARASA KATHIRKAMAR

Jaffna

1. Mr. KASINATHAR GANESHALINGAM (Member of the TRO Board of Directors)

To date the Sri Lanka Police and security forces have yet to conduct any meaningful investigation or inquiry into these disappearances. The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka investigated the case and made a report to its head that has never been released. In addition to not thoroughly investigating the abduction of the TRO aid workers the GoSL has also not listed their case among the 15 cases that the President's "Commission of Inquiry" will investigate. The atmosphere of impunity that exists in Sri Lanka has led to a steady decline in the status of human rights and the safety of humanitarian workers on the island.

Neither TRO nor any of the families have to date received any reports or response from any investigating authorities despite several persistent inquiries.

There have also not been any arrests or convictions in this case.

The abduction of the TRO aid workers was the first in a series of attacks on local and international NGOs and their staff. The Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) has, by design, made it very difficult for international NGOs, the UN and ICRC to work in the NorthEast with the tsunami and war affected populations.

The GoSL has sought to isolate the NorthEast from any humanitarian assistance by:

- Denying international NGOs access to the LTTE controlled areas of the NorthEast
- Limiting access for the UN and ICRC to these same areas
- Instituting a controversial "permit" process for international staff wishing to work in the NorthEast
- Executing 17 ACF aid workers in Muttur, allegedly by SL Army troops according to the independent Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM)
- Fostering and encouraging a general negative attitude towards and treatment of NGO staff and organizations
- Freezing US\$ 800,000 of TRO Tsunami Project Funds in Sri Lankan banks

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