



வடகிழக்கு மனித உரிமைகள் செயலகம்

North East Secretariat on Human Rights - NESOHR

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Arbitrary execution of Jesuthasan Sebaratnam exemplifies plight of Jaffna people

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Name: Jesuthasan Sebaratnam
Age: 36
Address: Naranthanai, Jaffna
Occupation: Farming
Marital status: Married with two children
Killed: 10 November 2006

“Voluntary remand” and “Convoy time” are phrases in common use in Jaffna these days and they reflect the new militarized civilian life of the people in Jaffna. “Voluntary remand” is the practice of voluntarily entering remand prison without any charges brought against the person to escape the Sri Lankan military operated death squads. Nearly 400 civilians including many children are in remand for this reason. “Convoy time” is the arbitrary reservation of major roads for the exclusive use of the military convoys compelling the civilians on the road to wait for hours before proceeding.

The two practices give a glimpse of the militarized civilian life. Fr S.M. Selvaratnam (Jaffna provincial superior of the Oblate Fathers of Mary Immaculate in Sri Lanka) in an interview given to a news media on 20 December 07 said, “*The people live in terror, because - and I am not exaggerating - anyone can come into your home and kill you, or shoot you while you are out on the street.*”

NESOHR staff are also not safe to work in Jaffna. We, therefore, cannot obtain details of the situation directly from the people of Jaffna. Indeed, people in Jaffna are fearful of the death squads to even take or receive telephone calls from Kilinochchi where our main office is located. We were, however, able to discuss with many civilians who have arrived in Vanni from Jaffna in recent times.

One Jaffna resident, who recently came to Vanni, described an incident that he saw on the road while in Jaffna which according to him is not uncommon. He said that he saw in the morning hours of one day the body of a man shot and killed lying on the road. His wife was sitting next to the body on the road wailing. The morning traffic of people going to work and school passed by and the passersby pretended that they did not see this scene. He said that the fear of death squads pervades life in Jaffna and prevents people from helping those in distress.

Importantly, we met one mother, Jeyakumari Sebaratnam, who was ready to come out and give the story of motorcycle gang execution of her husband very near her home in Jaffna. Jeyakumari's husband was shot and killed in Jaffna on 10 November 2006. Though this happened 18 months ago, her story is very similar to the more than 1000 death squad killings and white van abductions carried out over the last two years by the Sri Lankan military in Jaffna with assistance from paramilitary groups.

Jeyakumari, her husband Sebaratnam, and their two children, Pakeerathan now aged ten and Thushana now aged eight, were living in Kytes in Jaffna. They had been living there since they were married in 1998. Sebaratnam was farming his family land in Kytes. Jeyakumari's story of the killing of her husband is best paraphrased in her own words.

“After the A9 highway was closed there were many problems. Men from the EPDP paramilitary group and the Sri Lankan Navy kept harassing my husband asking him to join them or help them. My husband kept refusing. Once the paramilitary group was looking for someone to shoot near our home and my husband warned the potential victim about it. Later, one day, the EPDP men and Sri Lankan Navy men approached my husband and accused him of protecting their potential victim. They warned my husband about the repercussions for protecting their victim.

Few days later when my husband was out in town shopping, the same EPDP and Navy men stopped him and threatened him. My husband came home from town very late that morning. My husband told me that there was a long argument between the men and my husband. Later that day around 4.00pm my husband left to go to the shops. He did not return home till 6.45pm. By now I was waiting on the road for him. Around 7.00pm, I decided to go inside the house and as stepped inside I heard just two shots. Other family members living with us were standing outside the house. I came out running and asked what the noise was. My sister-in-law said that they must have shot someone. I was worried about my husband. I took the bicycle and went down the lane next to our home. I saw two people just leaving on a motorbike. I instantly recognized them as one from the EPDP and the other from the Navy. I know the two well because they have come home many times to persuade my husband to join them. I did not shout because I was frightened that they would do something to me as well. At that time I did not know that they had just shot my husband. I came to know that only later. I kept going down the lane and I saw something wearing white clothes lying on the ground near a wall. The light had started to fade by now. That lane where I now was is known as a dangerous place. I was alone, so I did not get off the bicycle. I went to all the houses I know and searched but there was no news about my husband. I was crying uncontrollably as I was riding back when my husband's younger brother (BIL) met me said that we should search again. We both went back home to check whether my husband had returned but he had not. Everyone at home was now crying loud fearing that something had happened to my husband. I told my BIL that we should check that lane again. As we went down the lane I asked my BIL to shine the light on the thing lying near the wall. There he was, my husband lying face down. I ran to him and put his head on my lap. He was breathing and I kept calling but that was the last breath. He did not say any words. There were five bullet wounds on his face. One had pushed one eye right in. He had received another shot on his stomach. My BIL brought a tarpaulin to cover the body. My BIL told me that we should leave the body and go home but I refused and stayed

with the body all night. Not a soul, except my two sister-in-laws, came to even see what has happened. Just the three of us and our children stayed all night with a lamp in that lane near my husband's body. Everyone kept advising me to go home but I refused.

The judge and the police came only at 11.00am next morning to conduct the investigation and then let us take the body home.

There was a court case on the murder. The judge asked me if I know the identity of those who killed my husband. Though I know the killers I told the judge that I do not know who killed my husband. I said this because I wanted to get out of Jaffna and if I identify the killers I could not have got out. The judge kept asking me again and again if I know the killers and I kept repeating that I do not know. I pleaded with the judge to finish the case and the judge closed the case after three hearings and gave the death certificate which just said that my husband was murdered.

I had a long struggle to obtain, the pass to leave Jaffna and a seat in the ship. I had to fall at the feet of the Sri Lanka Navy persons to obtain them to finally get out of Jaffna”.

Jeyakumari and her children now live with her aging parents in Vanni.

NESOHR has also collected several stories from families of cases of disappearances in Jaffna. A collated report on this will be issued shortly and this will paint the picture of the other side of this death squad activity namely the white van abductions.

NESOHR Team