

# URGENT ACTION

## ACTIVISTS IN NORTHERN SRI LANKA AT RISK

**Human rights defenders in Northern Sri Lanka have been arrested, detained, and threatened. This has coincided with the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva considering a resolution calling for an international investigation into alleged war crimes in Sri Lanka.**

Prominent Sri Lankan human rights activist **Balendran Jeyakumari**, was arrested along with her teenaged daughter in Kilinochchi, Northern Sri Lanka on 13 March. Officials confirmed that she has been detained by the Terrorist Investigation Department (TID) at the Boosa Detention Centre. Her daughter was later turned over to the Department of Probation and Child Care Services.

Amnesty International has documented extensive use of torture and other ill-treatment by TID officers in both Colombo and Boosa Detention Centre, and is concerned for the welfare of Balendran Jeyakumari. The Sri Lankan authorities claim she was arrested for harbouring a suspect in a shooting, which she reportedly denied in court. Several people, including a prominent local Member of Parliament, have accused the Sri Lankan authorities of staging the incident to frame her. Jeyakumari had informed local civil society and international media in February that she was being followed by a group of unidentified individuals, saying she was terrified.

Two other prominent human rights defenders, **K. M. Rukshan (Ruki) Fernando** and **Father Praveen Mahesan** were arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) by TID on 16 March in Kilinochchi, after they had sought to investigate Balendran Jeyakumari's arrest and ensure her daughter's welfare. They were released without charge on 18 March, but are still at risk of harassment and re-arrest, and face other restrictions on their rights.

### Please write immediately in English or your own language:

- Calling on the Sri Lankan authorities to release Balendran Jeyakumari, or charge her with a recognizably criminal offence and try her promptly in accordance with international fair trial standards;
- Urging them to ensure that Balendran Jeyakumari is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and is given full access to her lawyer, family and any medical attention she may require;
- Calling on them to ensure the safety of Ruki Fernando and Father Praveen Mahesan, and remove restrictions placed on their rights to liberty of movement and freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

### PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 2 MAY 2014 TO:

#### President

Mahinda Rajapaksa  
 Presidential Secretariat,  
 Colombo 1  
 Sri Lanka  
 Fax: +94 11 244 6657 (keep trying)  
 Email: prsec@presidentsoffice.lk /  
 lalith@icta.lk

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

#### Inspector General of Police

N K Illangakoon  
 New Secretariat,  
 Colombo 1,  
 Sri Lanka  
 Fax: +94 11 244 0440 (keep trying)  
 Email: igp@police.lk

**Salutation: Dear Inspector General**

#### **And copies to:**

#### Attorney General

Hon. Sarath Palitha Fernando  
 P. O. BOX 502, Hulftsdorp,  
 Colombo 12,  
 Sri Lanka  
 Fax: +94 (11) 243 6421  
 Email: administration@attorneygeneral.gov.lk

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:**

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY  
 INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Balendran Jeyakumari and her daughter have appeared prominently at demonstrations against enforced disappearances, demanding information about Balendran Jeyakumari's son Mahindan, who she has said was forcibly recruited by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and disappeared after surrendering to government forces in 2009. Balendran Jeyakumari and her daughter have also actively encouraged other women to come forward with complaints about their disappeared loved ones. Following Balendran Jeyakumari's arrest, other women demanding accountability for alleged enforced disappearances told Sri Lankan human rights defenders that they had received threatening phone calls from the police and were also worried about their safety.

On 16 March, following the arrest of Balendran Jeyakumari, security forces in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu launched a massive search operation in northern districts for a man they alleged was a former member of the LTTE who was attempting to help the LTTE "regroup" and had fired at police when they attempted to arrest him. The suspect was not found, but several people arrested for interrogation during this sweep were reported to have been physically assaulted, including one man who attempted to film the arrest of his brother. Both brothers were later released without charge. Search operations continued on 20 March in villages between Mullaitivu and Vavuniya, where more arrests were reported.

Ruki Fernando currently serves as Human Rights adviser to the INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre in Colombo. Father Praveen Mahesan, a Catholic priest, formerly served as Director of Jaffna-based Centre for Peace and Reconciliation (CPR) and is a parish priest in Kilinochchi. Both men are well known for their work supporting victims of human rights violations and their families. Police in Kilinochchi told a concerned colleague that Father Praveen and Ruki Fernando were arrested for supplying "false information" about the human rights situation in the North of Sri Lanka to damage Sri Lanka's reputation at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. The Officer-in Charge of the Kilinochchi police told a Colombo-based lawyer that Fernando and Praveen were under suspicion because they had visited families who had lost family members in the war. Officials in Colombo later claimed the men were being questioned about efforts of the LTTE to "regroup" from abroad or that they were "inciting violence among communities."

Name: Balendran Jeyakumari (f) K. M. Rukshan (Ruki) Fernando (m) and Father Praveen Mahesan (m)

Gender: f

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