

We reproduce below extracts from Issue No. 14 of *Censorship News*, a bulletin published by Article 19, the International Centre Against Censorship, listing examples of the violation of the right to free expression by the LTTE in the territories under their control.

## SRI LANKA: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION CASES IN THE NORTH

**T**his Censorship News documents the cases of individuals who have been killed or abducted by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in recent years as a result of having peacefully exercised their right to freedom of opinion and expression.

The three individuals whose cases follow were abducted by the LTTE on 30 August 1991. They were all involved either in the cast or in the production team of a play which was to have been staged on the day following the abductions. The play dealt with the Palestinian liberation struggle and focused on the role of women.

### Thiagarajah Selvanithy (Selvi) - University Student

Selvi was a writer, poet and dramatist studying at the University of Jaffna and was a member of the cast of the play. She worked as a volunteer at Poorani Illam, a home for traumatised women which Rajani Thiranagama co-founded. During the devastating bombing raids on Jaffna by the Sri Lankan air force she stayed with the residents of the Poorani Centre to reassure them. She had been a member of the women's wing of the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) and edited its paper *Sister*, but had left in protest at its human rights violations.

The LTTE went to her house on 30 August and said they wanted to take her away for questioning, and they would return her home shortly afterwards. The fellow residents of her house tried to intervene but she was forcibly taken away. The LTTE has reportedly stated that Selvi is being held because of her links with Christian funding agencies, and claimed that her life was not in danger. It is known that she had no direct links with fundraising for local projects; Christian charitable organisations had links with many local organisations and churches, and so the full implications of such charges are not clear.

### Manoharan - University Student

A final year student at the University of Jaffna, Manoharan was a leading member of the local Pax Christi group and was a member of the cast of the play. Manoharan was

active in humanitarian work with the victims of recurrent violence, bringing people together in fasts, Bible studies and prayer meetings, where emphasis was placed on non-violent action. Manoharan was a declared pacifist who had spoken out against the abduction of the "Theepori" dissidents three months earlier (see below).

### Thillainathan - Dramatist

Thillainathan, a dramatist and school teacher who was involved in the staging of the play, was also abducted by the LTTE on 30 August.

### V Senthana - Engineer

Senthana was abducted by the LTTE in mid-April 1992. He was a mechanical engineer who had worked in France, Canada and the Persian Gulf and had established a co-operative workshop in Jaffna. A poet both in English and Tamil, he was known for his socialist beliefs and for his active concern for the welfare of civilians. He was one of the few practising engineers remaining in Jaffna and at the time of his disappearance was about to begin making boats for use by the Red Cross to transport emergency food supplies to Jaffna, from larger boats anchored at sea.

Senthana is a victim of the general crackdown by the LTTE on individuals known to have dissenting beliefs, but the major reason for his abduction is believed to be that his brother-in-law, Dr K Sritharan, is a key figure in the University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) group.

### Maniam - Bookseller

Maniam, the owner of a popular Jaffna bookshop, was detained by the LTTE in December 1991. It is widely believed that the reason for his abduction was his close association with many university students and intellectuals who frequented his shop.

### The "Theepori" Group

The "Theepori" or "Sparks" group was made up of dissidents from PLOTE who left that organisation in early 1985 in protest against the growing totalitarian direction

of the movement which had extended to violent repression within the group. At considerable risk they published their accounts of torture and killings carried out by PLOTE in their book, *A New Kind of World*, and consequently faced persecution by PLOTE. The group continued as a literary society and a voice of conscience but essentially had to stop operating from mid 1986 under the increasingly repressive control imposed by the LTTE.

**Norbert**, a Tamil writer and a leading member of the "Sparks" group, was abducted by the LTTE around 20 May 1991. Although he had left Jaffna for Colombo the previous October, he had returned a few days before his disappearance to provide support for other members of the group who were threatened with violence.

Three University of Jaffna students who were linked with the "Sparks" group were also abducted in the days following Norbert's disappearance, two of whom are understood to have been released after several months.

### **Dr Rajani Thiranagama - Human Rights Activist**

Rajani Thiranagama was a leading activist in the University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) group and co-author of their book *The Broken Palmyrah*, which documents the human rights violations inflicted on the Tamil people by the Sri Lankan government, the LTTE

and the Indian Peace Keeping Force in the years from 1983-1990. She was Head of the Department of Anatomy at the University of Jaffna, a feminist, counsellor to traumatised women and a leading figure in the University's democratic and humanitarian activities. Dr Thiranagama was murdered by the LTTE on 21 September 1989 when she was cycling home from the university. Her murder is also believed to have been an attempt to curb dissent both within the University of Jaffna, where she was particularly influential, and in the wider community.

### **Shanmugalingam - Journalist**

Shanmugalingam was a Jaffna-based journalist who had worked as reporter at different times during the period 1986-1989 for the newspapers *Eelanadu*, *Eelamurasu*, *Murasoli* and *Viduthlai*. He had expressed views which were contrary to those of the LTTE who are known to have successfully pressurised the management of *Eelanadu* in 1986 to have him sacked.

He subsequently joined the staff of *Eelamurasu*. In 1987, when that newspaper came under LTTE control, the established LTTE spy "Jawan" was also a journalist on the paper. On 6 November 1989 an LTTE group led by Jawan came to Shanmugalingam's home and dragged him away from his wife and children. He is presumed to have been killed around mid-November 1989, possibly as a result of torture.

**The PEN Freedom to write - Award for 1992 has been given to Selvanithy Thiagarajah.**

These awards are given annually to two writers who have shown remarkable courage in exercising or defending freedom of expression and who have suffered as a result. The awards have been presented each year since 1987.

The recipient of the other award for 1992 was Haitian journalist Jean Mario Paul; he was also in prison, but was released two weeks after the awards were announced at PEN's annual ceremony.

In a statement released in New York on 2 September 1992, The President of PEN, Edmund Keeley says of the award to Selvanithy:

It had to be kept quiet at first. Selvi was in a precarious position and her friends advised us not to publicise her name or nationality in an-

nouncing the award. However, last week as the anniversary of her detention approached without there being any firm news of Selvi's whereabouts, her friends decided that the time had come to reveal that she had received this award. Now we are doing the same in an effort to persuade her Tamil captors to free her.

Precisely a year has gone by since Selvi's arrest. It is time for the Tigers to demonstrate that peaceful, well-intentioned criticism from within their community is not only tolerated but encouraged. If they want to gain respect from the international community, they should show themselves to be committed to safe-guarding internationally respected rights. They can only do this by releasing Selvi and others like her. **P**