



வடகிழக்கு மனித உரிமைகள் செயலகம்

**North East Secretariat on Human Rights - NESOHR**

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## **NESOHR report on the daily abductions in Jaffna**

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The sound of barking dogs and tramping boots in the neighborhood at night is a blood curdling experience for the families in Jaffna. Experience over the last two years has taught them that these are precursors to an abduction of a young man in their neighborhood that is about to occur.

For more than two years, NESOHR has been receiving complaints of disappearances occurring in the post ceasefire period in Jaffna. The earliest complaint received by NESOHR was in January 2006. It was a time when the A9 highway remained opened and the families of the victims reported the disappearances by coming to the NESOHR office in Kilinochchi. Indeed pictures of the mother of the very first of such victims were widely published in the international media. Once the A9 highway was closed, NESOHR ceased to receive such complaints in person. International media was also cutoff and thus silenced about the daily abductions in Jaffna. NESOHR, however, has maintained contact with people in Jaffna and is able to receive complaints of at least some of the disappearances from the families of the victims.

As the time progresses, NESOHR is able to observe a sharp increase in the level of reluctance of the families to speak about the abduction of a family member. This reluctance is induced by fear that pervades the entire community. As such several of the complaints of disappearances that we have received in 2007 have very little background information about the abductions. In fact, in many of the complaints, families make it a point to state that they do not know anything about the abductors. There are exceptions to this fear induced reluctance. To put this in perspective some statistics are useful.

The exact numbers of those who have disappeared in the post CFA period are not known to NESOHR. However, based on the statistics collected, it can be estimated that more than 1000 people have disappeared in this island in the post-CFA period. NESOHR has the names of more than 700 of those who have disappeared from the Tamil homeland alone. These are collected from various sources. Allowing for some inaccuracies in this data, we can still estimate the distribution of the disappearances over the various districts in the Tamil homeland. NESOHR estimates this distribution of the disappearances as follows: Jaffna-60%; Batticaloa-18%; Mannar-12%; Trincomalee-5% and Vavuniya-5%.

Referring back to the complaints that NESOHR continues to receive directly from families of the victims, so far, NESOHR has processed 33 of these complaints. These 33 cases that have been processed forms the basis of this report. The names of those disappeared are withheld from this report since families have specifically requested this.

Based on these 33 complaints of disappearances received by NESOHR and the more than 700 disappearance instances collected by NESOHR from various sources, the

circumstances of the disappearances in Jaffna can be categorized into three groups, abductions from the victim's home at night time; arrests in daylight that are later denied by the Sri Lanka military even though the arrest was watched by many eyewitnesses; and people who simply disappear and the disappearance remains a mystery with no eyewitnesses.

### **Abductions from home at night**

The most common form of abductions takes place at night in the victim's home. Fifty percent of the complaints we have received belong to this category. The statements made by the families in these complaints give away the method used by the abductors. Following are some samples of the statements made by the families of the victims.

- Someone knocked at the door of the victim's home one night and when asked what they wanted the response was to ask for the name of the occupant. On hearing the name of the occupant, the intruders wanted the victim to join them. When asked as to why they were taking the victim, the family was told to shut up and the intruders took away the victim. When family members followed the abductors to the road there were several more with guns waiting outside and all of them got into a white van and drove away with the victim. There were Sri Lankan military persons on patrol near the home.
- Number of men some with guns and wearing Tee-shirt and jeans with their faces covered came to the victim's home at 9.00pm that night and took away the victim in a white van. There was Sri Lanka military persons on patrol on the road outside.
- People with gun, axe and logs broke open the victim's door and dragged the sleeping victim. A short while later the noise of a vehicle could be heard. The home was on a main road and there were Sri Lankan military persons on duty on the road. There is a Sri Lankan military camp also near the home. When the family members were screaming on the road as the victim was dragged along the road, the Sri Lankan military persons on duty just watched and were amused by the screaming of the family members.
- The victim was abducted from his home in the early hours of the morning by men with guns. Some of the men were wearing Sri Lankan military uniform. Prior to this the Sri Lankan military took away the victim's National Identity Card during one of their cordon and search operation and ordered the victim to report to the their military camp. When the victim went to the camp he was ordered to report to the camp every week.
- Nine men broke open the victim's home at midnight and dragged the victim away. Just 250 meters east of the victim's home is a Sri Lankan Army camp and towards the west of the house is a Sri Lankan Army checkpoint. Neighbors have later told the family that they saw the victim being dragged into the Sri Lankan Army camp.
- About 15 men in Sri Lankan army uniform together with a few other men in black clothes broke open the door of the victim's home and abducted the sleeping victim saying to the family that he will be released in 30 minutes. That was the last sighting of the victim.

## **Arrest and disappearance**

The second most common method of abduction is in the pretext of arrests either on the road or during a cordon and search operation. Although these arrests are made in bright daylight with many eyewitnesses, the military later denies any knowledge of the arrest. These are the typical case reports.

- The victim traveling on a motorbike was arrested at a roadside checkpoint. The family receives information from eyewitnesses on the road that the victim was arrested while traveling on the road. In some cases people also report that they saw a military person riding the motorbike of the victim.
- Another scenario occurs during the frequent cordon and search operations. Many people thus arrested are also never seen again. In all cases there are many eyewitnesses. In some cases family members have watched the arrests only to be told later by the military that they did not arrest the victim.

## **Missing**

There are a few other cases among the complaints received by NESOHR where the background to the disappearance of the victim is a mystery. Some examples,

- a student who leaves home to attend some classes never returns,
- a victim who was last seen at a temple goes missing,
- a victim who leaves home to visit friend or a relative never returns.

In some of these cases strong suspicion is directed at the Sri Lanka military. In one case the family sees the victim's bicycle at a Sri Lanka military camp. In another incident the place where the victim was last seen was very near a military camp.

## **Conclusion**

The more than 700 names of those who have disappeared in the possession of NESOHR equate to one abduction per day, since the start of 2006. The 33 cases of witnessed abductions that are summarized in this report show the consistent behavior of the abductors unaffected by any international criticism over the last two years. The effect, however, is clearly seen in the families of the victims who are increasingly reluctant to point the finger at the Sri Lankan military fearing repercussions.

What NESOHR is also noticing lately in the newly captured eastern regions is the recreation of this Jaffna atmosphere. This will be subjects of future NESOHR reports.

NESOHR Team