

Failing the test: LTTE extortion continues unchecked

30th April, 2002

In the first explicit test of the monitoring agreement under the MOU, the Local Monitoring Committee of Batticaloa and the Norwegian authorities have bent to the will of the LTTE as a patent injustice occurs before their eyes.

Under Article 2 of the MOU: "The parties shall in accordance with international law abstain from hostile acts against the civilian population, including such acts as torture, intimidation, abduction, extortion and harassment. "

On April 15th, Mr. K. V. Sithamparapillai , an 82 year old person from 37 Bar Road, Thamaraikerny, Batticaloa was abducted and handed over to the LTTE in Paddiruppu. The LTTE threatened him and demanded a payment of 2.5 million rupees. After promising to pay the entire sum he was released with instructions to bring the money. His nephew had to stand for surety to secure his release. Although he was at first reluctant to approach the Local Monitoring Committee (LMC) to complain owing to both fear and pressure, he finally met some members of the LMC.

One of the LTTE nominees in the LMC was asked to meet the LTTE to verify the veracity of the incident. On his return this member confirmed that Mr. Sithamparapillai was indeed taken in by the LTTE and that the LTTE is insisting that the ransom of Rs. 2,500,000/- must be paid in full for his freedom.

The LMC was powerless to deal with the problem. On the 26th of April Mr. Sithamparapillai went to pay Rs 300,000 with an intent to asking for more time to obtain the rest of the money. However, he was again detained by the LTTE and threatened for reporting the incident of extortion to the monitoring committee.([see press](#))

It is a crying shame that civilians, particularly the old and the feeble should be subject to such predatory practices. In this case an 82 year old person's life savings is in the process of being expropriated extra-judicially under the very eyes of the international community. This troubling experience points to some of the flaws in the ceasefire agreement. We wish to submit the following observations:

- i) It seems that the MOU can be violated with impunity and the monitoring committee is powerless in defending the human rights, even when a violation clearly contravenes a provision of the agreement.
- ii) The LTTE continues to demand ransom even after [Amnesty International](#) released a statement regarding this specific case. This indicates that moral pressure alone is inadequate mechanism to curtail terrorizing of the civilian population.
- iii) Given the weight of the evidence, it is no longer adequate for LMC to wait for violations to be reported. We urge that the Norwegian monitoring team proactively investigate, particularly, the systematic violations. It is apparent that passive monitoring function by itself is inadequate to protect the civilians in the East and preventive measures must be implemented to protect the civilians from systematic violations.

iv) The peace process, while providing a welcome relief to the war weary country, has also entrenched and legitimized terror politics in parts of the country, i.e., the issue of long-term internal terror and its implications for the society have been glossed over. Hence it continue to diminish whole political and social space in the community.

v) If the Monitoring Committee and the international community allow this action to stand unchallenged it will undermine the credibility of all monitoring efforts and the peace process.

We urge all international and national civil society organisations to pool their resources, not only to secure the release of Mr.Sitharamparapillai and other prisoners, but go beyond the MoU and address the human dimension of the growing tragedy.