

Statement of SEP (Sri Lanka) General Secretary Wije Dias on status of Tamil socialists held by the LTTE

23 September 1998

Below is the text of the statement given by Wije Dias, general secretary of the Socialist Equality Party of Sri Lanka, to a press conference in Colombo on September 22.

The Socialist Equality Party has convened this press conference to bring to the attention of the public important new information concerning our five Tamil comrades who have been apprehended by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the Killinochchi district.

On Saturday, September 19 we received letters signed by two of the comrades who have been detained by the LTTE--Rajendran Sudharshan and Thirugnana Sambandan. These letters report that they and a third comrade, Kasinathan Naguleshwaran, were released unconditionally on the thirteenth. The letters indicate that the comrades have not been subject to torture or physically abused, but say details of the conditions of their detention will only be given later.

The SEP views this as a very encouraging development. If the facts reported in these letters are true, it should be possible to bring this sorry episode--in which the LTTE has persecuted members of the socialist party that has spearheaded the struggle against Sinhalese chauvinism and the 15-year racist war against the Tamil population in the north and east of Sri Lanka--to a speedy and just conclusion.

We have examined the handwriting of these letters and believe them to be genuine.

The information they relate, however, must be subject to further verification. Also, we need to establish that all three comrades are in good health and that none of them was harmed in any way. Finally, we remain greatly concerned over the fate of the other two SEP members who remain in LTTE custody.

In their letters both Sudharashan and Sambandan thank the SEP, the International Committee of the Fourth International and all those in Sri Lanka and internationally who demanded their release.

On behalf of the SEP as a whole, I would like to say that we are deeply gratified by the support our defense campaign has received from working class and human rights organizations and from concerned individuals here and in Europe, North America, India and Australia. I would especially like to thank Amnesty International for coming promptly to our assistance and issuing an appeal through its Urgent Action Network on behalf of the SEP members detained by the LTTE.

My thanks also go out to the *World Socialist Web Site* and our sister parties around the world. They have worked tirelessly to bring this matter to the attention of the international working class and to rally the support of all those who uphold democratic rights. And I would like to thank the many working class parties, unions, human rights organizations, artists and intellectuals in Sri Lanka who called for the SEP members' release. The support we have received has truly been impressive.

We intend, of course, to continue our international defense campaign until we have secured the release of all of our members and until we have had the opportunity, through direct contact with them, to establish that they are all in good health and to learn more about the interrogation that they underwent. To facilitate this, the LTTE should allow an SEP representative to visit Killinochchi or, conversely, permit one of the newly liberated detainees to travel to Colombo. We also seek assurances from the LTTE that there will be no further action taken against the five comrades or any other SEP supporters, and that their

democratic rights and those of the SEP will henceforth be respected.

To reiterate, we are heartened by the news we have received, but, being a responsible political leadership, cautious.

The LTTE leadership-in-exile never acknowledged that its officials in Killinochchi had detained members of the SEP, let alone offered any explanation as to why to they were arrested. We are hopeful, however, that this episode can now be brought to a speedy, satisfactory and just conclusion. Certainly, the release of the three SEP members--after some six weeks of captivity--would be a very important step in so doing.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that nothing that has taken place over the past two months has diminished our opposition to the war the Sri Lankan state has waged and continues to wage against the Tamils. I want to use this opportunity to reiterate our demand for the immediate withdrawal of all Sri Lankan security forces from the north and east. The war has not only been a tragedy for the Tamil people, the ruling class has used it to scapegoat the Tamils for the social crisis for which it is wholly responsible and to justify the suppression of the democratic rights of the working class and oppressed masses in the south.

See Also:

Colombo press conference called to demand release of all SEP members

Sri Lankan Socialist Equality Party cites reports that LTTE has released three Tamil socialists
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