

Support grows for inquiry into murder of SEP supporter in Sri Lanka

Our correspondent
28 September 2006

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka campaigned last week among students and lecturers at the University of Colombo for support for its demand that the Sri Lankan authorities find and prosecute those responsible for the murder of party supporter Sivapragasam Mariyadas.

Mariyadas was killed at his home in the eastern rural town of Mullipothana on August 7. He was shot through the head and neck after being called to the door at about 9.30 p.m. The gunman fled on a waiting motorbike. The most likely suspects are the security forces or associated Tamil paramilitaries. There was a heavy military presence throughout the region following bitter fighting with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the neighbouring areas of Muttur and Mavilaru.

Moreover, in the wake of the murder, the military deliberately spread false rumors that Mariyadas was an LTTE supporter, including at his funeral in his hometown of Selvanayagapuram. Mariyadas's murder is part of a broader campaign by the military, particularly in the North and East of the island, to intimidate and silence any opposition to the government's renewal of civil war.

The SEP team won important support from students. Members of the Sinhala extremist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) attempted to disrupt the campaign but retreated after SEP members challenged their support for war and their false claims to be "Marxist". The JVP, which commonly resorts to thuggery, has had a significant following on university campuses.

Students signed the SEP petition demanding a full investigation into the murder of Mariyadas and the prosecution of his killers. Many were concerned at the collapse of the 2002 ceasefire between the Colombo government and the LTTE.

Kushan Chinthaka, a political science student from the southern province of Galle, said he opposed the war. "I am saddened by the murder of Mariyadas. As you, I have suspicions. If the government denies your suspicions that armed officers have killed him then they have to have a full public inquiry. But, how can we trust this government to conduct a proper inquiry?"

"There are reasons for the war. Under Sri Lanka governments, [the rights of] Tamils have been undermined. Today if anybody speaks out against the war that person is labelled as an LTTE supporter. I am against the LTTE's policies. But due to the developing war, Tamil people are suffering. When there's a war in any county, the ruling classes claim that war expenditures are the first priority. While spending on the war, they are slashing the expenditure for education."

Rajeev Suresh, an engineering student at the University of Ruhuna in southern Sri Lanka, said: "Everyone has to support the SEP campaign to bring those who are responsible for the murder of Mariyadas to book. For the protection of everyone who opposes the war, these criminals must be exposed."

"The crisis in Sri Lanka cannot be solved through war. More communal clashes are developing. People have accused the Special Task force (STF) of the recent killing of 10 Muslims in Pottuvil in the eastern province. The

government is always misleading people using the media. There's no solution for the people. The government doesn't care about the people who are suffering from the war. Also the LTTE cannot protect or fulfill the needs of Tamils.

"President Bush is developing a war around the world, pretending he is against terrorism. [Sri Lankan President] Mahinda Rajapakse and his government are using the same methods. At the Non-Aligned Summit in Havana, Rajapakse said he was ready to start talks with the LTTE. But in Colombo, his minister Keheliya Rambukwella is demanding a statement from LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran promising to stop the violence [as a condition for talks]. This shows the government is not interested in halting the war."

Suresh expressed his opposition to a media witchhunt that is branding Tamil students in the northern town of Jaffna as LTTE sympathisers and demanding their arrest. He said students everywhere were facing increasing difficulty as a result of the cost of living and the lack of jobs on graduation. "If the government continues the war, the price of essential goods will rise further. How can people in Sri Lanka tolerate this situation?"

We call on our readers and supporters to assist our campaign by sending protest letters to the Sri Lankan authorities demanding a full investigation into the murder of Mariyadas.

Letters should be sent to:

Inspector General of Police Chandra Fernando,
Police Headquarters, Colombo 1, Sri Lanka.

Fax: 0094 11 2446174

Email: igp@police.lk

Attorney General K.C. Kamalasabeyson,
Attorney General's Department,
Colombo 12, Sri Lanka.

Fax: 0094 11 2436 421

Copies should be sent to the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka) and the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Socialist Equality Party,
P.O. Box 1270, Colombo, Sri Lanka.
Email: wswscmb@sltnet.lk

To send letters to the WSWs editorial board please use this online form.

We publish below a selection of letters and statements demanding the arrest and prosecution of Mariyadas's killers.

Inspector General of Police Chandra Fernando,

I am unreservedly adding my voice in demand that action be taken by the authorities to bring the murderers of Sivapragasam Mariyadas to justice. As this is clearly a political assassination, the violation of procedures by local authorities on the night of the murder can only be interpreted as an attempt to cover the tracks of the killers.

The town of Mullipothana, where the murder took place, was under an enforced curfew by security forces and circumstances were such that the streets were patrolled constantly. It is an affront to reason to expect the

public to believe the police have been engaged in a legitimate effort to apprehend the perpetrators of this heinous crime and as yet haven't been able to locate a single suspect.

Maridayas was well known as an opponent of the war and enjoyed the respect of his neighbors of all ethnicities. It is this, no doubt, that made him a target. His murder was a despicable and cowardly act, and those responsible must be brought to the light of day.

Sincerely,
James Webber,
Michigan, USA

I fervently denounce the assassination of Sivapragasam Mariyadas, a supporter of the Socialist Equality Party, on August 7 at Mullipothana in Trincomalee district.

Mariyadas was a supporter of SEP and thereby adhered to the principled political heritage of the SEP. The SEP has a long tradition of fighting against any form of anti-democratic moves, especially concerning state censorship and intimidation against critical artists and their creations. The SEP has vigorously intervened to take up a political fight against the banning of my latest cinema creation, "A letter of fire", only few months ago, building on this tradition.

Thus, this murder comes as a warning of terrorising all standpoints that oppose the war, especially a politically principled organisation in initiating the unity of the working class across ethnic and communal lines.

Therefore, I request a full investigation to be carried out and those responsible be charged for the crime.

Yours faithfully,
Asoka Handagama
Hokandara, Sri Lanka.

To Inspector General of Police Chandra Fernando,

We strongly condemn the murder of Sivapragasam Mariyadas, a professional photographer and a sympathiser of the SEP (Sri Lanka) for more than five years. We were shocked when we heard that he was shot by a helmet-wearing gunman in the Mullipothana area, which was controlled by the military.

Undoubtedly, it was a politically motivated killing by the force that wants to intimidate and silence the principal opponents of a communal war which has been devastating the country for more than two decades.

Before he was killed, Sivapragasam Mariyadas was investigating the circumstances which had led to the killing on 5 August 2006 of 17 aid workers from the international NGO Action Contre la Faim, (Action Against Hunger). After his death, evidence is mounting that the army was responsible for those killings, motivated by a wish to silence Mariyadas who had information which might expose Sri Lankan Army involvement in those killings. [See Editorial note below]

There have been numerous killings or so-called "disappearances" of Tamil youth in the North and East by army death squads who always use a white van without number plates to terrorise the people. During curfew, in an army-controlled area with so many checkpoints, the unidentified members of a killer squad, transported by the white van, are able to move freely. They break doors down to capture young people in front of their family members, drag them into the van, shoot them and throw their bodies into the street. Those who refuse to collaborate are shot down before the eyes of their family members.

According to the Human Rights Commission, in the last month alone 67 people have disappeared, including 37 killed in the northern peninsula. The failure to investigate and to take appropriate legal action is also evidence of the state's involvement. The present situation reveals that this is not a war between the two armed warring factions, but barbaric attacks unleashed by the well-equipped military of the Sri Lankan regime on its own unarmed innocent civilians.

We urge you to take immediate action to set up a public investigation into the murder of Sivapragasam Mariyadas and to bring the murderers to

justice. If you fail to reveal the murderers to the world and punish them, you will be seen as the defenders of the criminals in the eyes of the masses, not only in Sri Lanka, but around the world.

Yours faithfully,

Sittambalam Ambalavanar, Stephan Hugues, Muthaiah Athiyaman, Antoine Lerougetel, Kanthasamy Balakumarn, Pierre Mabut, Kapilan Cheliyan, Ratnam Rameshprasath, Kumaran Rahul, Karthigesu Kanthakumar, Suppiah Ariyam, Danial Ramana, Kirubakaran Vageesan,
From the World Socialist Web Site Readers Forum, France.

Editorial note: Mariyadas was murdered just two days after the killing of the ACF aid workers in Muttur. He had assisted the *World Socialist Web Site* to obtain an interview about the conditions in Muttur, but was not investigating the killing of the aid workers.

The assassination of Sivapragasam Mariyadas in Muttur, who stood for the great ideals of humanity and socialism, is an inhuman act. It is a great loss to the Socialist Equality Party, as well as internationalist socialists worldwide. The destruction of the lives of humanitarians and socialists like him is deplorable. I call upon the authorities to bring before the law those responsible for this assassination without delay.

K.S. Keerthi Ariyadasa, Senior Lecturer,
Department of Political Science and State Policy,
University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

As a citizen of Sri Lanka, I condemn the murder of Sivapragasam Mariyadas, which took place on August 7 in Trincomalee, and demand a full investigation of this and the arrest and charging of all those responsible by the Sri Lankan police and the government of Sri Lanka.

Nuwan Priyanga,
Ganemulla, Sri Lanka.
To the SEP,

I wish to support the demand for an impartial inquiry into [the murder of] Mr. S. Mariyadas for the following compelling reasons.

Unexplained murders of ethnic minorities are very common in Sri Lanka under Sinhala-dominated governments. Many such murders are not fully inquired into. This may partly be due to the general discrimination that is endemic in the island of Sri Lanka. There is discrimination at every level for the Tamil minority, whether it be employment to high positions in the government, selection of students to the law colleges and other professional courses, or appointments to the senior administrative service.

Now it seems, the planned discrimination has gone to a mean level: that the murder of the minorities is not inquired into properly according to laid down legal procedures. Impunity appears to have been given to the armed forces who perpetrate human rights violations, torture, rape and even murder. Many reports of independent observers confirm this view. Please see country reports prepared by the Home Office.

In Paragraph 3 of your report of 25 September, you state that "there is significant circumstantial evidence to indicate that the army, or an associated paramilitary group, was responsible for the murder". This is an incomplete statement. I understand that the paramilitaries, who act with the impunity and protection given to them by the government, may be responsible for murders similar to the murder of Mariyadas. Sometimes it appears even members of the armed forces accompany the paramilitaries on hit squads that carry out the execution of political activists who stand for reason and justice.

Therefore an impartial inquiry held by a neutral senior member of the legal profession will find out the killers of Mariyadas, particularly when the public of all nationalities are requesting an inquiry. I fully support the demand for a full inquiry into Mr. S Mariyadas's murder.

Paragraph 3 of your letter states that there is "escalating civil war". The government and some UN and other world watchdogs refuse to accept this. The "conscientious community" of the world, of course, perceives the present situation in Sri Lanka as a civil war.

Your article in paragraph 4 mentions the "island's war zones".

According to Sri Lanka, there are two areas where you find civilians in large numbers. The cleared areas (areas under the control of the armed forces) and uncleared areas (those areas under the control of the LTTE). Obviously there will be few civilians in the war zones that are located in the border areas.

There are reports of 5-10 unexplained murders and executions daily carried out by unidentified persons in the cleared areas. How can anybody explain these murders? It has been recently reported in the press that a magistrate was prevented from visiting the scene of murders to conduct magisterial murder inquiries in cleared areas.

Unless impartial inquiries are carried out by international humanitarian watch bodies, one may not know the perpetrators of the murder, as the government had given virtual immunity to its armed forces.

Mariyadas's murder merits such an impartial inquiry, as there is sufficient evidence and witnesses for this dastardly murder.

I call upon all responsible for human rights to demand a fair inquiry into Mariyadas's murder.

Dr C. P. Thiagarajah



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact