

Call for Amnesty International to demand inquiry into murder of Sri Lankan SEP supporter

Our correspondent
16 October 2006

Socialist Equality Party general secretary Wije Dias sent a letter this week to the secretary-general of Amnesty International in London calling on the human rights organisation to press the Sri Lankan government to investigate, arrest and prosecute the murderers of party supporter Sivapragasam Mariyadas.

Mariyadas was shot dead at his home in the eastern rural town of Mullipothana on August 7. The most likely suspects are the security forces or associated Tamil paramilitaries. As in similar cases of murders and abductions in the island's war zones, no serious police investigation has been carried out.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Sri Lankan SEP are waging an international campaign to demand the government identify and charge Mariyadas's murderers. In Sri Lanka, prominent film directors, university lecturers, artists, workers and young people have sent protest letters to the Attorney General and Inspector General of Police. Nearly 200 people have signed a petition demanding a full police investigation.

We publish below the full text of Wije Dias's letter to Amnesty International, as well as a selection of the latest protest letters and statements, and urge WSWs readers to support our campaign.

Letters should be sent to:

Inspector General of Police Victor Perera,
Police Headquarters, Colombo 1, Sri Lanka.
Fax: 0094 11 2446174
Email: igp@police.lk

(Note: Former Inspector General of Police Chandra Fernando retired on October 12.)

Attorney General K.C. Kamalasekera,
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.

The Secretary General,
Amnesty International
Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to bring to your attention the murder of Socialist Equality Party (SEP) supporter Sivapragasam Mariyadas at Mullipothana in eastern Sri Lanka on August 7. It appears, from all the circumstances surrounding it, that his death was a state murder, carried out by the military or one of its allied Tamil paramilitaries. It occurred amid the series of abductions, disappearances and extrajudicial killings being conducted by government forces under conditions of renewed civil war.

You are doubtless aware that just three days before Mariyadas's murder, on August 4, 17 aid workers attached to the French-based Action Contre la Faim (ACF) were killed in cold blood at Muttur, some 30 kilometres from Mullipothana. On August 30, the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission formally ruled that the army was responsible for these killings. Its aim has been to intimidate and terrorise the local Tamil population and anyone opposed to the government's chauvinist and militarist policies.

Mariyadas was well known in the Trincomalee area for his principled opposition to the war. He was respected by Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims alike. He was shot in the head and neck by an unidentified gunman at around 9.30 p.m. after being called in Tamil to the door of his home. The gunman then fled on a waiting motor bike.

Amid heavy fighting between the army and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) at Muttur and further south at Mavilaru, the town of Mullipothana was regularly patrolled by security forces. Soldiers were stationed near Mariyadas's home outside a school being used to house refugees from Muttur. As a result, it would have been difficult for the killers to move about by motor bike unchallenged unless they were known to the military.

Evidence of the army's attitude to Mariyadas emerged at his funeral. Soldiers stationed at nearby checkpoints actively attempted to discourage mourners, especially those who were Sinhalese, by falsely claiming that Mariyadas was an LTTE member. The SEP's political opposition to the LTTE is well known throughout Sri Lanka. In 1998, the party waged an international campaign to free four SEP members detained for more than a month by the LTTE in Kilinochchi for opposing its political perspective. Amnesty International issued a public statement at the time.

In the two months that have passed since Mariyadas's murder, the local police at Thambalagamuwa have failed to carry out any

serious investigation. In a letter to the Attorney General demanding a proper inquiry, the SEP pointed to basic breaches of procedure: the officer in charge moved the body without the approval of the magistrate and actively discouraged the magistrate from visiting the crime scene; the police have not taken the elementary step of obtaining formal statements from the home guard, who initially reported the murder, or from other witnesses. The next court hearing is not due until December 7.

As you will be aware, it is common for police to fail to investigate cases in which the security forces are implicated in the war zones of Sri Lanka. A statement issued by Amnesty International on May 16 raised concerns about the increasing number of civilians killed. It highlighted the murder of at least 18 civilians on or near Kayts Island on May 13-14 and stated that the organisation had credible reports that naval personnel and armed cadres associated with the Eelam Peoples Democratic Party (EPDP) were responsible.

AI's conclusion was particularly pertinent. After noting the government's announcement of an inquiry, the statement commented: "Amnesty International welcomes these initial steps but notes that there is a disturbing pattern of incomplete or ineffective investigations by the government, with the result that perpetrators of such violence generally operate with impunity. In accordance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Sri Lanka has ratified, the government must carry out an independent, impartial and effective investigation into all killings; the results of these investigations should be made public; and those responsible for the attacks must be brought to justice."

Since May, many more killings and ineffective police investigations could be added to the list. The SEP and its sister parties around the world are currently waging an international campaign, through the *World Socialist Web Site*, to demand that the Sri Lankan authorities find and prosecute Mariyadas's killers. We regard our efforts as essential in striking a political blow against the escalating state violence and the government-sanctioned culture of impunity that surrounds it.

We urge Amnesty International to issue a public statement condemning Mariyadas's murder and to use its influence to press the government to carry out an effective public inquiry that will identify, arrest and prosecute his murderers.

If you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Wije Dias

Dear Sirs,

Upon reading the *World Socialist Web Site* about the murder of Sivapragasam Mariyadas, as a German socialist I feel compelled to register my protest at the inactivity of the Sri Lankan authorities in the investigation to find the killer of Sivapragasam Mariyadas. From the circumstances of the case, it seems obvious to me that the Sri Lankan security forces had a direct hand in this crime, because it took place in an area directly under their control.

To this date, state officials brand Sivapragasam Mariyadas as an LTTE member or supporter. But this is a mere slander because Sivapragasam Mariyadas supported for years the policies of the Socialist Equality Party, which are very much opposed to the

nationalist perspective of the LTTE. The SEP fights for the unity of Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim working people for a socialist Sri Lanka and India.

The murder of Sivapragasam Mariyadas must be seen as part of the drive by reactionary political and state forces, to renew the disastrous policy of civil war, which has ravaged the country for far too long already. All opposition to this course is to be intimidated.

I support the policy of the SEP to mobilise all sections of the Sri Lankan working class on an internationalist program against the reactionary racist aims of the ruling elites of Sri Lanka.

I demand a full investigation into the murder of Sivapragasam Mariyadas.

Helmut Arens,

Frankfurt, Germany

Several people gave interviews during the SEP's campaigns in Sri Lanka for a petition demanding a full inquiry into Mariyadas's murder.

Tharaka Amaratunge, a fish vendor, said: "Mariyadas was murdered because he was opposed to the war. The campaign launched to expose the murder is very important to protect the democratic rights of people.

"The Sri Lankan media support chauvinist forces and are not telling the truth. The government rhetorically says that the military is engaged in defensive actions. War is bad for the lives of people. It affects people in the north and east as well as other areas too.

"We can't bear the increasing prices of essential goods. A bottle of kerosene oil is now 44 rupees. We need one bottle per night [for lamps]. One loaf of bread is 24 rupees. We can't find work every day. How can poor people afford the high cost of living in the country?

"Fishermen are suffering a great deal. There are strong winds at present. People can only go fishing during one season in the year. My job is selling fish to people but sometimes housewives have no money to buy it.

"Now the [opposition] UNP [United National Party] and [ruling] SLFP [Sri Lanka Freedom Party], the two main parties, are going to join together. They will impose more attacks on the people. Under the rule of capitalist parties, people cannot find any answers to their problems."

Kokila Amaratunga, a building worker, condemned the killing of Mariyadas. "I [also] condemn the killing of 10 Muslims in Pottuvil and all other such killings in the country. This war is launched to protect the state not the people. This is not our war. We don't want war. I am also opposed to the policies of LTTE. Now hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced."



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact