

# WSWS interviews tortured Tamil political refugee

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In April and May of 2009, the war waged by successive Sri Lankan governments since 1983 against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was coming to its brutal end with the crushing of the latter by the army.

President Mahinda Rajapakse's government and its military intelligence, aided by Tamil paramilitary groups, began round-ups in the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps of anyone who had "even a small connection" with the LTTE.

More than 11,000 Tamils were arrested, many of them women and youth. After a few days of screening in IDP camps, they were separated and given minutes to gather their belongings before being sent to so-called rehabilitation centres.

According to the government, 5,000 of these prisoners have been released. But they remain under close military surveillance. More than 6,000 people are still in secret camps and the so-called rehabilitation centres. They have not been charged with any crime, but most have been in detention since the end of the war. Under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), political prisoners in Sri Lanka can be held indefinitely without trial.

In May 2009, President Rajapakse boasted that the war was over and "LTTE terrorism" had been eliminated, but the arrests of "LTTE suspects" continue in the north and east, which are under military occupation. Last April 21, in the Trincomalee district, the security forces rounded up around 160 Tamil males and females from their houses for questioning. Thirty-eight people were detained under the PTA. They will be put through a year-long process known as "rehabilitation".

Amnesty International reported on March 14, 2012: "People released from detention have remained under

surveillance by intelligence forces. The Sri Lankan Army continues to have a large presence in the north and is deployed for civil policing. The Special Task Force (STF), an elite police commando unit with a history of human rights violations, remains active across the country. Former detainees have been harassed and rearrested, and physically attacked. Killings and enforced disappearances of newly released detainees have also been reported".

Last week, WSWS reporters in Paris interviewed a former Tamil political prisoner, now 28. A few months ago, to save his life, he came to Europe as a political refugee. For security reasons we do not give his name. He was held in several different "rehabilitation" centres.

The former detainee first told us about his early life, "I was born in Uruthirapuram in the Kilinochchi district. The area was under the control of the LTTE up to 2008. I studied at the high school. I have two brothers and one sister. My father was a shopkeeper. My mother was a housewife. My parents, like other parents, were always concerned with our studies and a better future for us. But the civil war turned life upside down.

"When the LTTE took control of the Vanni region, Kilinochchi was the LTTE administrative capital. The Sri Lankan military used heavy artillery weapons and war planes and bombing to capture Kilinochchi and the Vanni region where our house was. In 2007, my father was wounded and lost his leg. He died a few months later. Then we moved to the Mullaitheevu district, which was the last stronghold of the LTTE."

He continued: "Indiscriminate bombing killed and wounded many people. At the end of April 2009, my mother and sister and I finally decided to go to Vatuvasal, a government-controlled area. The army sent us to Omanthai military camp, where the Tamil

paramilitary groups operate. I was beaten by the Isaiyaruvi, part of the Karuna Group. Karuna had been in the LTTE before defecting to the army in 2004. They suspected me of being an LTTE supporter. Then the army sent me to ‘Menik’ detention farm with my mother and sister. [In the final stages of the war in May 2009, nearly 300,000 Tamil civilians were detained in this detention farm. It is believed to be the largest detention camp in the world in the twenty-first century].

“Twelve days later, soldiers and Karuna group men came to our tent and arrested me in front of my mother and sister. They cried and defended me as much as they could, but to no avail. They detained me for four months in ‘Nellukkulam rehabilitation’ centre.

“The conditions were very bad. There were 2,000 detainees in the camp. It was overcrowded; everybody had to wait in line for long hours to receive water. The food they gave us was not good, only rice with ‘sambar’ (a type of gravy), sometimes fish curry or meat curry. We slept on the floor. They gave us just one and a half litres of water to wash. There were only about 10 toilets for 2,000 detainees. The whole day, you could see long queues for drinking water and the toilet.

“Then they transferred me to the ‘Gamini maha vidyalayam’ centre. I was with 600 other detainees. I was there for nearly four months with the same treatment. Then they transferred me to the ‘Pampai madu’ centre. It is in a jungle area. About 2,000 men and 1,000 women were detained separately in this centre. I was there until April 2010.

“Finally, they transferred me to the Vavunia Tamil School centre. It was worse than the others. There were 400 of us. The Rajapakse government would show it to foreigners and tell them ‘This centre is to give an education to the detainees.’ But the reality was different. We could never speak to one another, just give each other a look and then walk on. I believe many intelligence people were planted among the detainees. Because of the bad treatment carried out by military intelligence, finally, I decided to commit suicide. That was the only option for me.

“When I was in these ‘rehabilitation camps’, several times military intelligence took me to Joseph military camp in Vavunia for interrogation. They relentlessly beat me and tortured me. One day, I asked them:

‘Former LTTE leaders such as Karuna, K. Patmanathan...and the Eastern province chief minister Pillaiyan are closely working with Rajapakse government without any trial. Why do you torture and imprison us? We are innocent’”.

It is no accident that this young man, like many other political prisoners, was fingered by the Karuna and other Tamil paramilitary groups. They represent the Tamil bourgeoisie, which collaborates with the Sinhala bourgeoisie while preaching Tamil separatism, in order to divide the Tamil and Sinhala working class.

The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and other Tamil bourgeois parties, including the remnants of the LTTE, claim to defend the rights of detained Tamils, but their demand, “Charge them, or release them”, accepts the legitimacy of the mass detentions.

The interview shows that the Rajapakse government’s propaganda about “rehabilitation” is fraudulent.

As social tensions sharpen in Sri Lanka, the government resorts more and more to Sinhala chauvinism to divide the Tamil and Sinhala working class. For decades, anti-Tamil chauvinism has been the chief ideological tool of the ruling elite to shore up its rule. The government is also stepping up its efforts to intimidate the Tamil diaspora, which continues to accuse President Rajapakse of committing war crimes.

The Socialist Equality Party, Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, demands that all political prisoners be immediately and unconditionally released.



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