

## *Human Rights Defenders Alert - India*

National Coordination Office

No.6, Vallabhai Road, Chokkikulam, Madurai 625 002, Tamil Nadu, INDIA

**Tel:** +91-452-2539520 **Cell Phone:** +91-9994368540 **Email:** hrda.india@gmail.com

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**Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders,**

Mrs. Margaret Sekaggya

c/o Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights - Palais Wilson

United Nations Office at Geneva

CH 1211 Geneva 10

Email: urgent-action@ohchr.org

Dear Sir,

**Sub: HRD Alert - India - Urgent Appeal for Action -India/Tamilnadu Sri Lankan Embassy vehicle pays a mysterious visit to Makkal Mandram - Reg**

Greetings from Human Rights Defenders Alert - India!

HRD Alert - India is a Forum of Human Rights Defenders for Human Rights Defenders. It endeavours to initiate actions on behalf of Human Rights Defenders under threat or with security concerns.

We are now writing to express our grave concern over the issue regarding the suspected spying activities of Sri Lankan government and its intelligence agencies on a human rights organization in a rural area in Kancheepuram district of Tamil Nadu, named Makkal Mandram.

We submit this complaint on the basis of the information received from the organization in question - Makkal Mandram, a Kanchipuram based organization, working among tribals, dalits and other downtrodden sections, whose member Senkodi immolated herself in August last year demanding commutation of the death sentence of the three convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, Perarivalan, Santhan, and Murugan.

According to the information received, on 27.04.2012, at around 9.50 a.m., a four-wheeler (**a navy blue Scorpio bearing registration plate number 6 CC 3966**) halted before the offices of Makkal Mandram at Sengodiyur Village in Kancheepuram. There were seven persons (including driver) in that

vehicle among which six were men and one woman (with short hair, boy-cut style).

According to Makkal Mandram's Jessy Gloria, an engineer turned activist, the persons in the vehicle started taking photographs without even lowering the glass on the car windows. When some of the women members of Makkal Mandram ran towards the car to see who it was, the driver made a sharp U-turn, pushed it to a great speed trying to drive away. Near the group houses in Sengodiyur village, he almost knocked down a small boy. The vehicle missed hitting him by a mere half inch as the boy jumped away in time.

Since the car had come on some mysterious purpose and was driven very rashly, activists at the commune rang up the other members in Kancheepuram asking them to locate the car and stop it on the way. Two members riding a motor bike caught the vehicle on Putheri Road near Kacheeswararnathar Temple and stopped it. But the men kicked the person who pulled open the door. The driver reversed almost driving over the feet of the other member in the process, overtook them and pushed the pedal once again. Witnesses have said the screeching tyres left sparks on the road. The vehicle was speeding at around 150 kms / hour then.

Since the vehicle number looked unusual, the members made enquiries and found out that **CC stands for Consulate Corps** and that this vehicle **belongs to the Sri Lankan Consulate in Chennai** through a Chennai based documentary film maker Santosh Gopal, a classmate of Jessy Gloria in college, who also lodged a complaint with officials at the embassy.

The Sri Lankan Consulate they admitted that the vehicle belongs to them and said it had gone out in the morning and had not returned. When an inspector there contacted the vehicle driver and asked him about the near accident at Sengodiyur, the driver immediately switched off his mobile phone.

Makkal Mandram made a formal complaint to the police at the office of the Superintendent of Police in Kancheepuram immediately. On 28<sup>th</sup> April, the Consulate informed that the vehicle had come on a spying / intelligence mission.

The entire incident was mysterious. The specific advantage of using a diplomatic vehicle is that it has diplomatic immunity and can't be stopped routinely by police or toll tax agencies etc. This leads the Makkal Mandram members to believe that they were planning to commit a serious crime and make a getaway in that vehicle and it is suspected to be an undercover operation. Their colleagues have also warned them that Sri Lankan government and its intelligence agencies are operating in Tamil Nadu and involved in the abduction of Eelam Tamil Sympathizers belonging to India. There have been baseless allegations in Sri Lanka in the recent past that LTTE cadres are being trained in Tamil Nadu. This Kanchipuram incident, which took place on the 27<sup>th</sup> of April, 2012 is evidently an independent operation by Sri Lankan intelligence personnel to probe if any such camp was located in the State.

Further the incident poses a threat and fear of personal safety to the activists who are perceived to be Tamil sympathizers.

The Sri Lankan embassy in Chennai admits without a qualm that it is indulging in spying activities in a rural area in Kancheepuram. However, the Tamil Nadu government and police department are ineptly watching these activities that are taking place in the sovereign territory without taking any action. The incident raises serious issues of misuse of diplomatic privileges by Sri Lankan officials in Chennai and calls for urgent measures from the State and Central Governments to rein in the notorious intelligence operatives in the Lankan embassy.

**Appeal:**

1. To guarantee physical and psychological safety and integrity of Makkal Mandram human rights defenders and other members;
2. To direct the police both in Kancheepurm and Chennai City to register proper cases and then carry out an immediate investigations into the issue of the mysterious visit by the Sri Lankan Embassy vehicle to the office of Makkal Mandram in the rural area of Kancheepuram and the threat to life that this visit caused and initiate legal action against the driver, inmates in the car and those responsible for providing them orders from above if any ;
3. To pass orders prohibiting such spying activities being carried out by the Sri Lankan Consulate in Chennai on human rights organizations and HRDs in Kancheepuram and elsewhere.
4. To demand that the Sri Lankan Consulate apologizes to the officials of Makkal Mandram for all the anxieties that they have so far caused them by their action and assure them that this shall not be repeated.

Yours sincerely,



*(Henri Tiphagne)*

Honorary National Working Secretary,  
Human Rights Defenders Alert - India