

## Abduction of political activists Premakumar Gunaratnam and Dimuthu Attygalle

7<sup>th</sup> April 2012

Political activists and leaders of the People's Struggle Movement in Sri Lanka, Mr. Premakumar Gunaratnam<sup>1</sup> and Ms. Dimithu Attygalle<sup>2</sup> disappeared on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2012. Prior to their disappearance both activists had been preparing for the first convention of the Frontline Socialist Party, a party formed by a dissident group from the opposition party, *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (JVP - meaning People's Liberation FRont). FSP party members had received credible information that both activists were under intense Government surveillance, shortly before their disappearance. There is currently no information regarding their fate or whereabouts.



Mr. Gunaratnam was a key leader of the People's Struggle Movement (PSM) and Ms. Attygalle was the Secretary for Women's and International affairs of the organization, which was a forerunner to the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP).

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Gunaratnam had studied at Kegalle St. Mary's College, Pinnawala central College and Peradeniya University. His brother, Ranjitham Gunaratnam, who was a Poliburo member of the People's Liberation Front (JVP - the party from which the new party Frontline Socialist Party broke away) and was assassinated by the government in 1989. After the repression of the JVP in late 1980s, Mr. Gunaratnam played a key role in reforming an reviving the party.

<sup>2</sup> Ms. Attygalle had studied at Bandarawela Central College and at Teachers Training College. She has been an activist of the People's Liberation Front (JVP ) since 1988 and became the National Organizer of the Socialist Women's Union.

Mr. Gunaratnam had been instrumental in forming the FSP which was due to be launched officially on 9<sup>th</sup> April 2012 and he was expected to be appointed as its head. The PSM has campaigned actively since its formation against the systemic violation of human rights by this Government including, disappearances, extra-judicial killings, illegal detentions and militarization in the North.

### **Details of Disappearance**

Mr. Gunaratnam is believed to have been abducted from his temporary residence at No.29/1, Gemunu Mawatha, Kiribathgoda (Colombo district), on 6<sup>th</sup> April. He was last seen by a party member who dropped Mr. Gunaratnam at his residence in Kiribathgoda at around 5 pm on 6<sup>th</sup> April following a party meeting. At around 11 pm that day, Mr. Gunaratnam spoke to the same party member and asked to be picked up from his residence at 5 am the following day (7<sup>th</sup> April). Mr. Gunaratnam has not been seen or heard from since.

The party member who arrived at Mr. Gunaratnam's residence at around 4.30 am the following day (7<sup>th</sup> April), found that the air had been let out of all four tyres in Mr. Gunaratnam's vehicle (No. NWKE 9457). On further examination he found that the door locks had been broken. Mr. Gunaratnam could not be found and was not contactable on his mobile phone. A neighbour had told police that 4 or 5 armed men had come to the house at around 4.30am on the morning of 7th April and instructed her to shut off lights and stay indoors. When she had looked out around 5.15am, she had seen nothing unusual.

According to party members, Mr. Gunaratnam's **mobile number** was ringing till around 8 am on 7<sup>th</sup> April but was not answered. The phone is currently disconnected or unreachable. The GPS coordinates of Mr. Gunaratnam's mobile phone indicate that the phone was in the Thalawathugoda area on 7<sup>th</sup> April morning. However there is no further evidence regarding his whereabouts.

Ms. Attygalle was last seen by a party leader who dropped her at the Kottawa bus stand (Colombo District) at around 6pm on 6<sup>th</sup> April. Ms. Attygalle confirmed that she was going to her residence at 32/14/7, High level road, Henawatte, Meegoda (Colombo district). However Ms. Attygalle did not answer her **mobile phone** the following morning and it had been confirmed that Mr. Attygalle had not arrived home on 6<sup>th</sup> April.

### **Police complaints/action taken**

On 7<sup>th</sup> April 2012, Mr. Ajith Kumara, Member of Parliament, filed a complaint with the Police Head Quarters in Colombo regarding Mr. Gunaratnam's disappearance, recorded under I CIB I 105/19. MP Ajith Kumara also filed a separate complaint with the police head quarters regarding Ms. Attygalle's disappearance recorded under I CIB I 105/20, on 7<sup>th</sup> April.

Mr. Gunaratnam's sister-in-law, Dr. Nandani Somaratne, also filed a complaint with the Pilliyandala Police (Colombo district) on 7<sup>th</sup> April, recorded under CIB 306/133.

Mr. Duminda Nagamuwa, a party leader, filed complaint number CIB I 11/135 with the Kottawa Police on 7<sup>th</sup> April regarding the disappearance of Ms. Attygalle.

The Australian High Commission in Colombo has been informed of the disappearance as Mr. Gunaratnam is an Australian citizen. The media, diplomatic community and human rights groups have been informed about the disappearances.

Police spokesperson told media said neither of the two had been taken in for questioning or arrested by the Police.

Prior to their abduction, Mr. Gunaratnam and Ms. Attygalle were engaged in intense negotiations in preparation for the first party convention on 9<sup>th</sup> April 2012. Party members had received credible information that Mr. Gunaratnam was under intense surveillance by the Government during this period. As a safety precaution Mr. Gunaratnam and Ms. Attygalle always informed party members of their whereabouts and never switched off their mobile phones.

FSP party members believe that Mr. Gunaratnam and Ms. Attygalle have been abducted by forces linked with the Government since the party has campaigned actively against human rights abuses by the Government, particularly against the Tamil minority in the North.

PSM activists have suffered threats, attacks, intimidation and surveillance due to their work. PSM activists Lalith Weeraraj and Kugan Muruganandan were abducted on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2011 in Jaffna and have not been seen or heard from since<sup>3</sup>. Lalith Weeraraj was repeatedly threatened by police and military prior to his abduction and ordered to stop his work in the North. There has been no information or credible investigation into their disappearance despite widespread protests, local and international campaigns and a habeas corpus petition before the Court of Appeal in Sri Lanka. The families of both men have also suffered threats, harassment and surveillance following their abduction.

Media reports indicate that there have been twenty nine disappearances in Sri Lanka between February and March 2012 and a total of fifty six disappearances over the past six months<sup>4</sup>. There have been repeated incidents of threats, harassment, attacks and intimidation against HRDs and activists travelling to/working in the North apart from the systematic attacks against national level HRDs and journalists during the Human Rights Council Sessions in Geneva in March 2012.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://groundviews.org/2011/12/19/disappearance-of-human-rights-defenders-political-activists-lalith-kumar-weeraraj-and-kugan-murugan-on-9th-december-2011/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://groundviews.org/2012/04/05/horrible-rise-of-disappearances-in-post-war-sri-lanka-continues-unabated/>