



Sri Lanka must immediately release Sivakaran and other Tamils held under the PTA

Recent spate of arrests and abductions raise further doubt about Sri Lanka's reform efforts

(Washington, DC; April 27, 2016) PEARL is deeply concerned by Sri Lanka's latest arrest and detention under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) of Subramaniam Sivakaran, a Tamil activist and journalist from the North-East. Sivakaran was arrested in Mannar by the Terrorism Investigation Department on Wednesday, April 27. The arrest came days after he publicly criticized the PTA and the continued detention of Tamils under the Act.

Abductions and arrests of many Tamils across the North-East, although commonplace for decades, have been greatly increasing in recent weeks. The Sri Lankan state continues to deploy its notorious "White Vans" to abduct Tamils, who in some cases later turn up in police or military custody. Although the current government recognized the flawed nature of the PTA and pledged to review and repeal it, the law remains in force and security forces continue to use it to detain Tamils. The existence and application of the PTA also facilitates abuses in custody, like torture and sexual violence.

The ongoing climate of fear in the North-East makes it difficult, and even unsafe, for civil society actors, journalists and human rights activists to work. This volatile environment is also likely to hamper preparations for Tamil commemorations of the end of the war on May 18. Sivakaran himself was involved in organizing the 2015 remembrance day, but was forced to cancel the event after threats from the police.

Sri Lanka must immediately stop arresting and detaining Tamils under the false pretenses of national security, and must release all who are currently detained under the PTA. Further, Sri Lanka must fulfill its commitment to repeal the PTA. PEARL also calls on the United States to strongly and publicly urge Sri Lanka to abide by its domestic and international promises, by releasing detainees and taking immediate action to repeal the PTA in law and practice.

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