

Forthright in defence of human rights

Wednesday 5 August 2009, by [KARUNARATNE Vickramabahu \("Bahu"\)](#) (Date first published: 3 August 2009).

There is general criticism aimed at those who defend minority national rights stating that such defenders are oblivious to what the Tamil rebels have done to ordinary people and the people who were taken as prisoners. Of course, this is incorrect. We have always opposed attacks on ordinary people, especially on women and children who are oppressed by the war. Attacks on other fighters, simply because they bear a different view on Tamil liberation, have to be condemned as it means our own survival. This has been our position in the past as well. But the criticism continues. If these criticisms are made by arrogant chauvinists such as Champika, Tilvin and Wimal we need not reply; because it is a useless exercise.

But when some intellectuals and military leaders make comments we have to take it seriously and attempt to reassert the truth. Recently in a book launching ceremony of a book written by a retired general, a well-known publisher made such a comment. He said that during the time of President Premadasa over 600 police officers were taken into custody by the LTTE and some of them were murdered but, no human rights campaigner or defender of national rights was there to make a noise! I got the impression that the general who was commanding officer at that time must have made an adverse comment on us in his book. So it is a serious matter particularly because even today we are in the forefront of a Tamil liberation struggle. Hence we must make sure that our track record is clear to those who willingly or by negligence distort history.

Amnesty International

As soon as we heard of the disappearance of these police officers we informed the relevant authorities, including Amnesty International(AI). We made an open appeal to provide any information available about this tragedy. On 9th July 1990 the government confirmed that out of over 600 police officers who disappeared, around 289 had been murdered and the rest were missing. Immediately thereafter, we appealed to Amnesty International to take action to save these people. We appealed to them because at that stage AI was the organization that made an international campaign about the disappearances in Lanka. We have worked with them since 1989. Our intervention was published in the *Daily News* on 13 July 1990 as follows:

"NSSP CONTACTS AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL"

It is true that we could not save them; saving a few, all others were murdered. But our efforts were recognized by the *Dinamina* paper. Its editorial on 16 July 1990 commented that the Nava Sama Samaja party stood for the rights of these policemen who were unarmed when they were taken into custody. That is history.

Hence there is no room, at least in connection with this event, for anybody to blame us, for not standing up for the rights of missing policemen. Any human rights campaigner should be fair and honest while being dedicated to the liberty of humans. Even a liberation fighter who does not see the relevance of liberty for all people will be making a sectarian mistake that could lead to defeats and failures. We have explained this over and over again. In this scenario, it is certainly ludicrous to see a reputed general, allowing such lies and lapses on an occasion launched by him!

P.S.

*From lakbimanews column of August 3, 2009.