

Sri Lanka rights activists quit panel in protest over killings

Colombo. 16/10/2007

Four top Sri Lankan activists have quit a human rights panel in protest over the government's failure to stop extra-judicial killings, abductions and illegal arrests, one of them said Monday.

Nimalka Fernando said she and three other members of the advisory committee set up by the Human Rights Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe had resigned because the authorities failed to take action to improve the island's rights record.

"We noticed that even presidential directives aimed at protecting rights of detainees were not followed by the police," Fernando told AFP. "We noticed that the government was not serious about improving the human rights situation."

The four resigned last week, but the decision was only announced following the departure of UN envoy Louise Arbour from the island after failing to secure agreement from Sri Lanka to monitor the island's human rights record.

Samarasinghe told Arbour, the UN high commissioner for human rights, that Sri Lanka would not agree to her call for UN monitoring. Arbour and Samarasinghe addressed a news conference together, but both made it clear they disagreed on how to tackle the situation for civilians in the embattled country, where more than 60,000 people have been killed since 1972.

Arbour said authorities had dismissed allegations of human rights violations as propaganda by separatist Tamil Tiger rebels, but she believed there were "credible allegations that deserved to be investigated."

Violence has surged on the island since a Norwegian-arranged truce began unravelling in December 2005.