

## **Interview 24: SRI LANKA: Weerasinghe**

Mrs. Weerasinghe, 63, is Buddhist woman who has a small business selling bed sheets. Her sons were 16 and 17 when they were arrested in 1989, but the family was never able to find out what happened to them.

### **What do you think about the policing system in your country?**

I have absolutely no faith in the police and I don't care about them. My two sons were taken by the police for revenge on a personal matter. They were taken in the middle of the night when we were sleeping. The police arrived and said that they needed to take the boys in for questioning; they were with some civilian thugs. My husband went to the police station in the morning and he could see that two of those people from the night before were there. We found out that two other boys had been taken that night with my sons. But [the police] never took any of our statements, or wrote down anything. They just said "we weren't involved and they aren't here." We went to the station two or three times, then to the main station in town where we could see that young boys and girls had been arrested there. They were being kept there, and we heard, even in a nearby college. People would go there to try to find their sons and daughters. But we were not allowed to go inside; we could only see in from the outside. We had personal contacts with some

officers, and they told us that the boys were taken about a matter in which my son had questioned and argued with a bus conductor. Some of our village council elders had problems with us as well. I hear that the police officer who the conductor spoke to got a promotion. Some police officers work for money - for bribes. They would tell us that our sons were here or were there if we paid them. We had to sell our properties.

### **What do you think of the police's use of torture?**

It should be prevented. In those days, we parents got to hear from each other that they were cutting [the young detainees'] hands and putting salt and chilli powder onto their wounds; some people I know said they could hear shouting and crying inside the station. We got to hear a lot more about how the police tortured the people inside, and how sometimes they would be drunk and laughing. I think that although torture is taking place now, it's not as bad as it was back then. But I know that even now it is happening. If the government can pass a bill and they can get a policy to carry out investigations without assaulting people, by taking statements or interrogating without using torture, then things can change. I think that higher-ranking officers should pressurise lower-ranking officers not to do this. I know there's a law against torture because now I have seen books and posters from NGOs.

### **What are your views on the public relations of the police?**

The police treat poor people very badly, and so the people don't have any confidence in them. I know how they treat people who have power, too. They need to treat people equally. I can't say that the police are getting better, though I suppose this time period isn't as bad as 1989 or 1990. It would be good if they could make more reform within the system. I don't think police officers can ever be punished because they are the worst people, and the police don't punish other police! So I would recommend that more training happens.

**If you have a problem these days would you go to the police station?**

I would go to the police. I'm not scared of them anymore and I have the courage to go. I would not expect much help, but there is no other choice.

Is there a law against domestic violence in your country and what is your opinion of it? I'm not sure about that.