

## **Interview 34: SRI LANKA: Nishanthi**

Nishanthi, 42, is a housewife with two children and a husband who works as a veterinary assistant in Korea. Two years ago, she joined a support group run by a local human rights organization, and now regularly accompanies victims of rape and torture on their journeys to, through and from court trials.

### **What do you think about the policing system in Sri Lanka?**

Before I joined the support group, my impression of the police wasn't so bad. I knew the police weren't fair, and knew that people couldn't expect much help from them, but I didn't know it was this bad as. Now I know what is really happening. I know how bad it really is if someone goes to the police station for justice. But even though I don't have a good image of the police, there are also some police officers who work in a positive manner and do some good.

### **What do you think about the relationship between the police and the public?**

The police are very powerful; they can do anything they want. They can kill the innocent, they can produce any evidence and they can write any statement on their own; the people think they are very powerful. But they should learn how to treat people. They should be kind and work for the sake of humanity. Humanity is a most valuable thing. Some police officers are very money-minded. If a man can spend money, the police will accept or follow his opinions. If, for example, I have a personal disagreement with someone, if I have some money I can pay off the police and make trouble for that man; it is like the police can be rented or hired. Normally, army people or soldiers become very strong but still treat people well. But the police act in a lowly way and do not treat people kindly. I hope that the police can learn to be friends with people and treat them with respect, in a humane way.

### **If you had a problem, would you go to the police station to file a complaint?**

I would try to go to the police station because that is the only place we can go to for help. If I couldn't get the result that I wanted, I would turn to some of these organizations – the NGOs.

### **What do you think about the use of torture?**

If parents cannot beat their children and teachers cannot beat their students, then a police officer cannot assault a person. There is no law or right which allows the police to torture people. If a man should be punished, he should go through the legal system and be punished fairly. It is illegal for anyone to commit assault. And when there is torture, the victim will not always give the correct information.

I think that people feel very helpless. But the responsibility is with the community; the community has to inform higher-ranking officers that some police officers are not working properly, so that they take the necessary steps to correct their behaviour. [The community] also has to become more educated about these issues. The government and the authorities are responsible, and the community should also inform the government, namely the Inspector General of Police or the President, when something bad is happening so that they can take the necessary steps to improve the situation. Unfortunately, I feel that the government is not listening to the community, so we have to work harder to be heard.

For myself, I could see that this organization was doing very good work with people seeking justice; I admired it. I was a housewife and so rather than spending the day at home, I decided to join them and work with people who need help.

What do you think about the law against domestic violence?

I know that there is one. According to Sri Lankan culture, when disputes happen inside the house, for example between parents and their children or a husband and wife, they usually try to solve the problems themselves and don't want to talk about it openly. Usually the wife will bear the problems, so this law is probably not used very much. I think if a woman goes to a police station and tries to take legal action against her husband, when she goes back home she will be beaten by her husband.