

Demonstrators silently protest abductions, killings in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka - Hundreds of local and international nongovernmental activists, wearing black cloths over their mouths as gags, staged a silent protest at Colombo's central train station.

The approximately 400 demonstrators were denouncing the recent abduction and killing of two Red Cross workers, Shanmugalingam Kandiah, 32, and Mahadevan Chandramohan, 27, who were abducted from the same station days before the June 6 protest.

Holding the black cloth away from his mouth, Father Terrence Fernando of St. Anne's Church in Negombo told UCA News, an Asian church news agency: "Nobody can give their life back. It is terrible."

Father Fernando said the government should take responsibility for the killings.

He added that although the church has expressed concern about the violence in Sri Lanka religious leaders need to take more action.

"Religious leaders issue statements only," said the priest, who brought lay Catholics from his parish north of Colombo.

On June 1, an unidentified group abducted the two Red Cross workers. Their bullet-riddled bodies were found June 2 at a tea plantation 62 miles southeast of Colombo.

The Red Cross in Sri Lanka said the killings would jeopardize the commitment of its other volunteers in delivering humanitarian assistance to the needy in Sri Lanka. It called on the authorities for a full investigation.

At the train station, rush-hour commuters intent on catching trains home stopped to look at the silent protesters. About 100 of them were foreigners holding banners and signs in English, Sinhalese and Tamil that read: "Your grief is our grief," "Stop abduction and killing" and "We share your grief."

However, no slogans were shouted.

Stories of missing business people, academics, activists and journalists abducted in Colombo, their bodies often found discarded on the roadside, appear almost daily in the news.

Sarojini Sivachandran, an activist, told UCA News that she was scared.

“Daily there are murders, abductions and extortion,” she said.

The government has called for an impartial inquiry into the killings, reported local media. However, the country’s parliamentary opposition claimed the state had a hand in the killings.

The Sinhalese-led government is locked in conflict with rebels who have been fighting for Tamil autonomy in the north and east since 1983. About 60,000 people have been killed and more than a million displaced.