



Sri Lanka Must Heed the Call of Victims and Address Disappearances

(Washington, DC; August 30, 2017) Today, on the International Day of the Disappeared, PEARL stands in solidarity with those affected by enforced disappearances. Around the world, countless families continue to live with uncertainty about the fates of their loved ones in violation of their right to truth.

Sri Lanka is one of the countries most affected by disappearances, the vast majority of which were perpetrated by state security forces. Since the end of the armed conflict in May 2009, the families of the disappeared have participated in various government commissions. However, their efforts to seek information about their loved ones were fruitless and often met with state harassment. Despite the hope that accompanied the change in government in 2015, the plight of the families of the disappeared persists.

Across the North-East, the families of the disappeared have conducted a continuous protest, demanding answers. Today marks the 192nd day of that protest, but the government is still ignoring their calls. The Office of Missing Persons (OMP), introduced by the government and Southern civil society with much fanfare, exists only on paper. Additionally, while the president made a much-publicized promise to provide a list of all those detained by security forces when he met with the families of the disappeared in June, he is yet to fulfil that pledge. Instead, the government has made promise after promise to these families, only to let them down.

Furthermore, security forces have surveilled and even physically attacked disappearance activists. The government's silence on activists' calls for action at best indicates indifference and at worst complicity. The lack of transparency in setting up the OMP and other mechanisms related to transitional justice, and the failure to include the input of victims point to the government's disinterest in the needs of the Tamil community. Even when victims are consulted, the government has historically ignored Tamil voices. In recent times, the government ignored the results of its own Consultation Task Force. It would be cruel to subject affected families to yet another farcical mechanism.

The Sri Lankan state's repeated betrayals have shattered what little faith remained among the people. If the government is serious about addressing the concerns of those affected, it must enable their rights to both truth and justice. To fulfil justice, the government must unequivocally pledge to investigate the forces responsible for enforced disappearances and be willing to prosecute and punish those found guilty. To fulfil truth, the government must establish the OMP taking on board recommendations made by those affected by enforced disappearances. The demands of the affected communities must be considered during this process, otherwise, the OMP will be one more entry in Sri Lanka's long list of failed accountability mechanisms.

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