



**Remembering the Kumarapuram massacre**

(Washington, DC; February 11, 2018) 22 years ago today, in a small Tamil village in the North-East of Sri Lanka, a group of soldiers murdered 26 people, left 24 others injured, and gang-raped a 15-year-old girl. Twenty years after the Kumarapuram massacre, on July 27, 2016, an all-Sinhalese jury at the Anuradhapura High Court acquitted the six accused Sinhalese soldiers of all 606 charges, finding them innocent of these crimes.

After conducting an in-depth analysis of court records and interviewing lawyers and survivors, PEARL published its [report](#) “Impunity Reigns in Sri Lanka: the Kumarapuram Massacre and Acquittals” in March 2017. In addition to detailing two decades of debilitating investigative and judicial proceedings, the report identifies five key barriers to credible prosecution within the Sri Lankan judicial system when the alleged perpetrators are Sinhalese soldiers and the victims and survivors are Tamils.

These obstacles to Tamils obtaining justice include improper investigation and evidentiary issues; transfers of cases from Tamil areas to predominantly Sinhalese areas; intimidation and harassment of victims, witnesses and others involved in these cases; the approval of a Sinhala-speaking jury trial without consulting defendants; and political barriers such as a lack of political will, politicization, and delays in proceedings.

Nearly nine years after the end of the armed conflict, security forces continue to intimidate victim-survivors across the North-East. Militarization in the Tamil region is rampant and perpetrators of countless of mass atrocity crimes remain free. Today’s election result in the Sinhala south has reaffirmed the precarious existence of Tamils and minorities on the island. Already slim hopes for progress on political reforms and transitional justice mechanisms are in tatters. The failure of the government to tackle difficult issues head-on, including impunity for mass atrocity crimes and the toxic nature of Sinhala nationalism which triggered the conflict, has resulted in a Sri Lanka which is once again becoming more dangerous for the Tamil-speaking people. The international community’s premature lauding of progress contributed to this government’s lack of political will. This must change.

PEARL continues to stand with the survivors of the Kumarapuram massacre and other atrocities committed with impunity on the island. Justice for this case, amongst many, remains crucial for healing processes to commence. Without accountability, a reconciled Sri Lanka, safe from a return to violence, will remain elusive.

**“We want justice because we are worried this could happen again – what stops the army from coming back into our village to finish the rest of us off if there is renewed ethnic violence?” – victim of the Kumarapuram massacre.**