



### **Remembrance, Resistance and Resilience**

(Washington, DC; May 18, 2018) Today Eelam Tamils gather in the Tamil homeland and around the globe to commemorate Tamil Genocide Day, remembering not only the tens of thousands killed in the final phase of the armed conflict, but also those lost throughout the struggle against oppression. Despite constant surveillance and intimidation by security forces, Tamils in the North-East have defied the state to stage memorial events every year since 2009.

The Sri Lankan state caused the vast majority of deaths over the last 70 years. The atrocities the Sri Lankan state forces are alleged to have committed during the last phase of the war include deliberate shelling of No Fire Zones where civilians were told to gather, extrajudicial execution of surrendered civilians and combatants, and horrific sexual violence against those in custody. These crimes were so systematic and widespread that it defies belief that they could have occurred without sanctioning by the structures of the state. These were not the acts of a few bad apples.

Today, Sri Lanka has largely rehabilitated itself in the international arena, despite a failure to acknowledge or punish the atrocities committed by the security forces. The state has back-tracked on promises to the Tamil people and to the international community to pursue justice, as we highlight in our report released earlier this week. Yet the government's empty commitments and meaningless platitudes are being rewarded by Western governments, through increased engagement, including with the military, and resumption of economic incentives such as GSP+ and Millennium Challenge Corporation funds. Soldiers implicated in war crimes are being sent on peacekeeping missions.

Meanwhile, the state has treated the victim-survivor community with disdain. Families of the disappeared have protested for over a year, waiting for the government to fulfil basic promises. Many of the families at the protests saw their loved ones taken into custody by state forces in May 2009. Yet the state continues to deny the evidence of their eyes, insisting that these accounts are untrue. While an Office of Missing Persons has now been established, the time it took for it to be operationalized, the resistance in the south to mere conversations about involvement of Sinhala "war heroes" in atrocities, and the complete failure of the state to build confidence in this office amongst Tamils, do not bode well for its work.

The Sri Lankan state runs on Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism. This is evident in its failure to honor its commitments to the Tamil community and it is evident in its anemic response to the recent attacks on the Muslim community. Any expectation that the recent violence would trigger critical introspection on Sinhala-Buddhist supremacism and racism amongst the Sinhalese population was misplaced. The underlying factors that have driven Sri Lanka's history of violence remain unaddressed.

To expect justice to come from domestic mechanisms under these conditions is at best naïve. The Sri Lankan state will not even allow the survivors to commemorate atrocity victims freely, let alone provide accountability for their deaths. But the Tamil people remember, and resist. Nine years after the most calamitous day in Eelam Tamil history, the nation's resilience is nothing short of remarkable. PEARL stands with the Tamil nation today, in remembrance of what we lost.