



## PEOPLE FOR EQUALITY AND RELIEF IN LANKA

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Washington, D.C.; May 18, 2019 – Today, on the 10th anniversary of the Mullivaikkal Massacre, marked annually as Tamil Genocide Day, PEARL expresses its profound grief and sorrow to the victims and survivors of the violent bloodshed experienced during the final phase of the armed conflict. This period saw the deaths of 70,000-140,000 Tamil civilians, primarily due to the Sri Lankan military's intentional shelling of safe zones and extrajudicial executions, the maiming of thousands from that shelling, and at least hundreds of incidents of sexual violence. As we mourn the lives taken by the brutal state-sponsored genocide, we also acknowledge the pain rooted in the end of the decades-old resistance that sought a separate Tamil homeland.

Ten years later, the Sri Lankan government has taken limited action to address Tamil grievances, including demands for accountability. In the immediate aftermath of May 18, 2009, President Rajapaksa's strategy relied heavily on increased militarization, surveillance, and intimidation of Tamil communities in the North-East, all of which exacerbated unaddressed root causes of conflict and disillusionment with the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist state.

After Rajapaksa lost the 2015 presidential election to Sirisena, Tamils felt a renewed, albeit cautious, sense of hope for promised "good governance and reconciliation." Under Sirisena, Sri Lanka co-sponsored UN Human Rights Council Resolution 30/1 following the UN OHCHR Investigation on Sri Lanka (OISL report) revealing horrific war crimes and pledged to fulfill key commitments related to post-war accountability and transitional justice. However, in four years, the Sirisena government has made little to no progress on key issues such as impunity, enforced disappearances, military occupation, land grabs, and security sector reform. Furthermore, in defense of protecting 'war heroes,' it repeatedly decries international involvement and steps towards accountability despite its repeated promises to the international community. This has only continued to dissolve Tamils' faith in the political will of both the government and the international community to deliver results on truth and justice.

In our remembrance, it is important to reflect on the complicity of the international community in the Tamil genocide. Its unflinching support of the Sri Lankan state during the height of the conflict despite increasing evidence of human rights violations, such as the military's deliberate shelling of no-fire zones, including makeshift hospitals, and the calculated deprivation of humanitarian aid, enabled mass atrocities. Although the UN had a responsibility to protect at-risk populations like the Tamil people, it withdrew from the war zone around September 2008. In the 2012 Petrie report, the UN examined its actions in Sri Lanka and acknowledged that such blatant violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law resulted in part from its own grave "systemic failure." Today, members of the international community continue to fail the Tamil people by rewarding the state's lack of progress with a substantial increase in positive engagement and bilateral support.

It is clear that permissiveness toward Sri Lanka's foot-dragging is ineffective and will not yield meaningful change — on the contrary, this has undermined the progress that is possible. This gentle prodding, with no consequences for inaction, has not pushed the Sri Lankan government to address the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism that has permeated the island and fueled ethnic and religious tensions since independence. This month, in the wake of the horrific Easter Sunday bombings, we have yet again witnessed the consequences of ongoing structural discrimination and impunity, with a particular focus now on the island's Muslims.

The resurgence of Sinhalese mob-style violence is not unique and indicates a further legacy of supremacist ideals that leave non-Sinhalese communities vulnerable to violent persecution. Without



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dealing with the root cause of oppression — Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism and impunity for violence against other communities on the island — the cycles of violence will continue. The ongoing failures of the state to address long-standing grievances has reinforced the Tamil people's need for self-determination.

The Tamil struggle is long-standing, resilient, and relentless. At the peak of the Tamil genocide, entire cities were halted by massive diaspora demonstrations. In fact, homeland and diaspora connectivity has steadily strengthened since the wartime period. Together, Tamils at home and abroad are furthering the movement by calling for formal genocide recognition, alternative paths to justice, and public education around the struggle for justice and self-determination. Ten years on, the UN and individual states must take steps to ensure the respect and protection of Tamils' individual and collective rights.

Today, we mourn the dead, attempt to understand our collective trauma, and actively call for justice and accountability.