



International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict: Sri Lanka's Strategic Use of Sexual Violence Against Tamils

(Washington, D.C.; June 19, 2019) – On the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, PEARL condemns Sri Lanka's ongoing conflict-related sexual violence against Tamil women and men and demands justice and accountability for its egregious crimes. In addition, during the final phase of the armed conflict, hundreds of Tamil women and girls were raped, gang-raped, subject to forced nudity, and otherwise sexually abused and extrajudicially executed. Rape, in particular, remains a tool of political repression and reprisal by the Sri Lankan state.

Ten years after the end of the armed conflict, sexual violence continues to affect Tamil victim-survivors and political prisoners detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). As of 2018, [Tamil men are as likely](#) as Tamil women to be sexually tortured in detention. There is also evidence that conflict-related sexual violence exacerbates a process of destroying the fabric of Tamil society in Sri Lanka, fueling an already prevailing Sinhala-Buddhist ethnocracy. The military occupation of the North-East, where in parts there is up to [1 soldier for every 2 civilians](#), increases the risk of sexual violence for Tamil women.

The UN's [report](#) on conflict-related sexual violence during 2018 underscores Sri Lanka as a known perpetrator of conflict-related sexual violence. However, it does not acknowledge the ethnic dimension of the violence that overwhelmingly affects Tamils in the conflict-affected North-East. Particularly troubling is the way the report seems to attribute Sri Lanka's inaction on justice to the constitutional crisis of October 2018 rather than recognize that the state's lack of progress stems from an absence of political will. In doing so, the UN implicitly upholds Sri Lanka's culture of impunity for state-sponsored rape and other forms of sexual violence. These human rights violations specifically target Tamils and particularly Tamils who had actual or suspected ties to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). PEARL urges the UN and states to validate the experiences of Tamil victim-survivors by acknowledging both the political nature of conflict-related sexual violence on the island and Sri Lanka's lack of political will.

Only last week, Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister, Tilak Marapana, was invited to participate as a panellist at the international *Ending Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Humanitarian Crises* conference in Norway, where two UN agencies were among the hosts. This blatant disregard for Sri Lanka's victim-survivors of sexual violence is deeply insulting and enables Sri Lanka's false narrative of peace and reconciliation. The UN's treatment of Tamil victims is all the more disturbing in light of the UN [systemic failure](#) during the mass atrocities of 2008-2009.

When committed with genocidal intent, conflict-related sexual violence is an act of genocide that has been strategically used by the Sri Lankan state to cause serious physical and mental harm to the Tamil people on the island. It is vital that the actions of the Sri Lankan government are internationally recognized as genocide in acknowledgement of the immense trauma harboured by Tamil victim-survivors. PEARL implores all concerned individuals to join our [petition](#) calling on members of the international community to recognize the Tamil genocide and to establish alternative paths to justice, such as exercising universal jurisdiction over suspected perpetrators.