



### Tamil Right to Remember Must be Respected

Washington D.C.; November 24, 2020 – PEARL is deeply concerned about the ban of commemorations of Maaveerar Naal, the Tamil National Remembrance Day, across several districts in the North-East. This is a disturbing escalation in the state's repression of Tamil memorialization. We condemn the aggressive intimidation from Sri Lankan authorities of those involved in organizing commemoration events and stand in solidarity with those resisting this renewed abuse of legal processes and COVID-19 restrictions.

Sri Lanka's army commander and alleged war criminal Shavendra Silva said last week that Maaveerar Naal commemorations would be prohibited, citing COVID-19 restrictions and threatening legal action against those who resisted the order. Since then, organizers observing social distancing measures, who attempted to prepare the locations of LTTE cemeteries for commemorative events, were obstructed by the police. Security forces have also set up checkpoints in close proximity to the cemeteries across the North-East. These cemeteries were bulldozed by the military during and after the war – in itself a cruel act designed to strengthen the state's supremacist and vengeful narrative.

Furthermore, local courts have specifically banned public events and have issued orders against several individuals and political parties, including the Tamil National Alliance and the Tamil National People's Front from organizing or even attending events. While COVID-19 restrictions are used as a pretext to justify the bans, the continued targeting of individuals engaged in benign acts of remembrance, such as the use of red and yellow flags and banners, reveal the government's intent to suppress Tamil memorialization activities for what they are — acts of defiant remembrance and resistance to the majoritarian narrative.

We are particularly disturbed at the targeting of members of the protesting Families of the Disappeared with court orders restraining them from holding or attending any commemorative events – irrespective of whether they have been involved in their preparation. PEARL has seen court documents naming individuals involved in these long-running protests and banning them from attending commemorations. This feeds into the wider pattern of intimidation and harassment of the Tamil families of the disappeared, whose protests have continued to irk authorities and garner attention to the issue of enforced disappearances in Sri Lanka.

In September, PEARL warned that “abuses of legal processes will lay the groundwork for further bans, arrests and intimidation including around Maaveerar Naal on November 27 and Tamil Genocide Remembrance Day on May 18.” Unimpeded memorialization is inextricably linked to healing and honoring those lost in the war, and has been one of the fundamental demands of the Tamil people post-2009. PEARL urges the international community to send an unequivocal message that banning Maaveerar Naal commemorations is an unacceptable transgression of Tamils' right to remember.