



International Women's Day: Calling for an End to Gendered Harassment and Violence Against Tamil Women in Political Spheres

(Washington D.C.; March 8, 2021) – On International Women's Day (IWD), PEARL recognizes the legacy of Tamil women leading the fight against state oppression, oftentimes amidst patriarchal violence within their own communities. Today also marks over 1,400 days of protest by the Tamil Families of the Disappeared and the 10th day of hunger fast by Ambihai K. Selvakumar, a director of the UK-based International Centre for the Prevention of Genocide (ICPPG). They continue in the long tradition of Tamil women placing their bodies on the frontlines in the pursuit of justice and freedom for the Tamil people. We honor their struggle and again call for an end to the gendered harassment and violence against them.

To this day, toxic masculinity and patriarchal structures are rampant in the Tamil community. Gender-based violence continues to harm and kill Tamil women, in the diaspora and in the homeland. While we see some grassroots movements to address these issues, more needs to be done on a systemic level to ensure the safety and protection of Tamil women. It is important that challenging patriarchal violence becomes embedded in the education systems and cultural activities across the Tamil nation.

Political and activist spaces continue to be dominated by men. Despite most of the crucial protests in the Tamil homeland being led by Tamil women, including the Families of the Disappeared and protests regarding land issues, the political conversations and discussions often happen without any of their representatives. Amongst the various Tamil diaspora and civil society organisations fighting for the rights of Tamil people, only a minority have Tamil women in leadership positions. But this is not a call for token representation – Tamil women must be part and parcel of deliberations and decisions that have a disproportionate impact on their lives.

PEARL continues to have robust dialogues around these issues and is open to conversations with other community organizations and activists. It is simply not enough that women occupy positions within political organizations when the voting and decision-making power lies with men. Today, we reiterate our call for political leaders, leaders of civil society organizations, and diaspora organizations to include equal participation of women in decision-making roles; to train leadership on preventing, identifying and responding to allegations of sexual harassment and abuse; and to actively oppose traditional gender roles in favor of gender equity. It is after all, Tamil women, that form the backbone and heart of the struggle.