



PEARL Stands with Victims' Families on International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances in Sri Lanka

Washington D.C.; August 30, 2020 – Today, we mark the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances. People for Equality and Relief in Lanka (PEARL) stands in solidarity with all victims of enforced disappearances, and the many thousands of family members and friends of the disappeared who continue to seek justice for their loved ones.

This day is particularly poignant for the Tamil community hailing from the island of Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has one of the world's highest numbers of enforced disappearances, with a backlog of 60,000-100,000 disappearances since the 1980s and during the entirety of the country's ethnic conflict. White-van kidnappings became synonymous with government-backed extrajudicial killings, and security forces have continuously been implicated in these forced disappearances.

At the end of the country's armed conflict in 2009, tens of thousands of Tamil civilians and ex-cadres left the war zone and surrendered to the Sri Lankan government forces, relying on government assurances about their safety. Thousands have not been heard from since, despite surrendering into government control alive.

The families of these loved ones have been protesting for more than 1200 days, searching for justice and information about the plight of their loved ones. Braving the elements, these Tamil mothers, fathers and loved ones of the disappeared began their protest in Kilinochchi, Sri Lanka in February 2017 and have held near-constant vigil since, demanding answers from the government, the United Nations, and the international community. At least 73 protesting family members have died without ever learning what happened to their disappeared loved ones.

To mark this year's International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, the families of the disappeared are organizing a large-scale protest in the towns of Jaffna and Batticaloa, and are calling on civil society to join them. They have also released a set of demands to the international community, noting that the failure of successive governments to provide answers and accountability for their missing loved ones has led them to lose faith in any domestic resolution to this issue. In the absence of credible and meaningful government action, it is the role of the international community to intervene and promote justice.



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PEARL stands in solidarity with the families of the disappeared, and echoes their demands:

1. The Sri Lankan government must release information, including the names, of those who surrendered to government forces in 2008-2009, and if any continue to be detained, must release these individuals as well.
2. The Sri Lankan government must provide information on all currently detained political prisoners, and release them in due haste.
3. The Sri Lankan government must provide information on all those who were kidnapped into or kept in refugee camps both before and after the war.
4. All ex-cadres who are currently being detained or rehabilitated must be released.
5. The ongoing Sinhala colonization and land-grabs of Tamil lands must cease immediately.

The families of the disappeared also demand war crimes investigations and investigations into genocide against Tamils by the Sri Lankan government, including at the International Criminal Court.

For too long, the plight of the families of the disappeared has been used as a speaking point and a prop for politicians and the international community, but no concrete measures have been taken.

The international community contributed to the destruction of Tamil lives and Tamil political aspirations in 2009 - it is now time for the same international community to meet the demands of the families of the disappeared.