State-sponsored Sinhalization of the North-East
Policy Recommendations

This report details PEARL’s findings that the GoSL is engaged in a continuous and historical process of "Sinhalizing" the traditional Tamil homeland in the North-East of Sri Lanka in an attempt to change the political and demographic makeup of the North-East. This Sinhalization predates the armed conflict and has been occurring since the time of independence. Coupled with the systematic oppression of the Tamil people and minority groups, such as the Muslim community, and the complete lack of accountability for past and ongoing crimes, the report shows that the root causes of conflict remain unaddressed well after the end of the armed conflict in 2009.

Our evidence-based recommendations below require significant engagement from the GoSL, members of the international community, Tamil political leaders, international NGOs, civil society, and Sinhala civil society to address the root causes of the conflict and grievances, as well as ensure that there is a durable political solution in Sri Lanka that respects Tamils' human rights and offers them justice, accountability, and control over their own land and affairs.

To the Sri Lankan Government:

On The Mahaweli Authority and Other Irrigation-Settlement Policies

- Create a transparent, accessible, and flexible process for conflict-affected Tamils to have their land claims adjudicated and recognized, even if formal documentation is unavailable, in line with international best practices.
  - Immediately suspend the powers of the Mahaweli Authority pending the creation of said process for resolving land claims and providing land restoration, which is accessible to affected Tamil and Muslim populations in proposed land areas.
  - Ensure the immediate implementation of existing judgments against the Mahaweli Authority.
  - Cease providing subsidies to new settlers in "unclaimed" land.
  - Suspend all new settlement activities until existing Tamil and Muslim claims to land are fully and transparently adjudicated.
- Publicly commit to releasing all private and public lands that are currently occupied by the military, unless consent for the ongoing military presence is obtained from the local community.
- Cease grabbing traditional Tamil lands in the North-East through other government-appointed departments, including but not limited to the Department of Archeology Department
- Ensure pledges on land return are time bound, transparent, adequately reviewed and recorded, and publicly available.
- As per the Dudley-Chelva pact of 1965, settlement land in the North-East should be allocated in the first instance to landless persons in the district. secondly, to Tamil-speaking persons resident in the Northern and Eastern provinces, thirdly, to other citizens, preference being given to Tamil residents in the rest of the island.

---

Security Sector Reform

- Immediately undertake a genuine security sector reform process to demilitarize the North-East, including the removal of members implicated in atrocity crimes or ongoing human rights violations.

- Reallocate the military throughout the island in proportion to provinces' population, rather than continue the overwhelmingly disproportionate militarisation of the North-East.

- Return all private lands held by the military to their rightful owners, and ensure lands are in comparable condition to when the military initially acquired the land.

- End the entrenchment of victors' narratives and the practice of war tourism, including by removing and ceasing to construct 'victory monuments' and other visible references to the military's 'humanitarian operation'.

- End the surveillance and harassment of Tamils for exercising their democratic freedoms.

- Remove Buddhist statues and viharas that were established by the State and security sector. Issue directives to the military that, despite Article 9 of the constitution, the security sector must be divorced from all matters of religion. Any future construction of religious sites in the NorthEast must follow proper legal procedures governing the construction of religious buildings.

- End the entrenchment of victors' narratives and the practice of war tourism, including by removing and ceasing to construct 'victory monuments' and other visible references to the military's 'humanitarian operation'.

- Respect Tamils' right to memorialize their dead in accordance with the victims and families' wishes and cultural practices, and allow them to commemorate significant dates and events in the Tamil national consciousness without government obstruction or harassment.

- Adopt and enforce a no-tolerance policy for harassment and gender-based violence by security personnel who violate this policy, with prompt investigations and prosecutions by an independent, civilian entity.

Religious Freedom and Cultural Heritage

- Disband the Archaeological Heritage Task Force.

- Ensure that any and all archeological and cultural development are not directly or indirectly in furtherance of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, and instead such development should be done in consultation with all ethnic and religious groups, with particular mind to groups that have been historically marginalized.

Memorialization

- Respect Tamils' right to memorialize their dead in accordance with the victims and families' wishes and cultural practices, and allow them to commemorate significant dates and events in the Tamil national consciousness without government obstruction or harassment.

  - Immediately cease the banning of memorial activities through injunctions, legal filings, police orders, or other legal/civil means.
To Other States

- Evaluate the GoSL’s progress on its pledges regarding accountability, justice, demilitarization, and human rights against the range of available independent evidence, especially from victim-survivor groups and communities in the North-East and diaspora.

- Support international initiatives, including through multilateral mechanisms such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, to establish field offices in the North-East and to monitor ongoing violations, colonization schemes and land grabs with the support of local communities.

- Acknowledge that the Tamil community in the North-East, who were and remain the most conflict-affected and who are most at risk of ongoing human rights violations, has consistently rejected any form of domestic justice mechanism due to the lack of political will by Sri Lanka to meaningfully address the root causes of the conflict.

- Ensure bi-lateral trade relations and concessions are tied to security sector reform and meaningful progress on land issues.

- Ensure any dialogue with the GoSL is transparent, publicly available to Tamils, bears tangible progress, and remains accountable to the Tamil people.

To International NGOs and Sri Lankan/Sinhala Civil Society

1. Collaborate with Tamil politicians, civil society, and Tamil diaspora groups to pursue avenues for justice for ongoing Sinhalization that centers the demands and experiences of Tamils.

2. Engage the Sinhala public on the importance of a meaningful political solution for lasting peace in the country, including by challenging the government’s narrative of the war and roots of the conflict.

3. Consider and support legal challenges to confront the ongoing processes of Sinhalization, including through research and legislative reform initiatives.

4. Challenge the Sri Lankan state to pursue a meaningful and durable political solution in Sri Lanka.