



### **International Women's Day: Celebrating the pivotal role of Tamil women in the struggle against oppression and working towards structural change within our community**

**Washington D.C.; March 8, 2022** – 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 1843 days, over five years, since women-led families of the disappeared began protesting by the roadside in Kilinochchi to demand answers regarding the fates of their forcibly disappeared loved ones. We stand in solidarity with the women protesting across the Tamil homelands today, including mothers who just protested over recent days in Batticaloa, despite push back from Sri Lankan police. From the families of the disappeared, to civil society activists, to women who participated in the freedom struggle and diaspora protests since 2009, Tamil women have placed themselves on the frontlines in the pursuit of justice and freedom for the Tamil people. PEARL honors their struggle and calls for an end to the gendered harassment and violence against them, including in political spheres.

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.

Most 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 organizations 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 call upon 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.