



The Tamil people's resistance against growing state oppression and the unwavering courage of Tamil women

Washington D.C.; October 10, 2023 – PEARL condemns the Sri Lankan state's recent attacks against Tamil protestors and victims, including the Families of the Disappeared, at a protest organized to coincide with a Presidential trip to Batticaloa. On Sunday, as the President addressed a crowd on the "importance of national unity to resolve ethnic and religious issues" the Sri Lankan police brutally attacked Tamil protestors, including women and the Mothers of the Disappeared. The police also interrogated and intimidated members of the Tamil Families of the Disappeared, preventing them from attending the protest. In contrast, just a day earlier, the police allowed an unruly Buddhist monk-led protest to proceed without interference.

The Tamil community has continued to resist state-sponsored land grabs, the destruction of Tamil places of worship, and the illegal construction of Buddhist viharas across the North-East, in areas such as Batticaloa, Trincomalee, and Mullaitivu. Peaceful Tamil protests, which have also amplified calls for justice for the state's war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, and the right to Tamil memorialization and self-determination, have been met with either police surveillance, intimidation, and violence, or with Sinhala mob violence, led by Buddhist monks. The Sri Lankan police have ceaselessly tried to block Tamil protests physically and through numerous legal injunctions.

Decades of impunity for the state's crimes have enabled the Sri Lankan police to severely harm those who defend Tamil rights such as freedom of expression and memorialization. More broadly, the Sri Lankan state's unwillingness to address current issues and the root causes of the conflict is a clear indication of its strong political commitment to inaction and denial of wrongdoing.

In particular, Tamil women have been the target of state intimidation, harassment, and violence. The Tamil women-led Families of the Disappeared have continuously engaged with truth-seeking mechanisms, to the detriment of their safety, and still do not have answers on the whereabouts of their loved ones. However, they remain fierce and defiant about their rights and call for internationalized justice mechanisms in the face of the failure of the state's domestic accountability efforts. The Mothers of the Disappeared have engaged with the international community year after year, staunch in their commitment to finding answers on the whereabouts of their loved ones, in spite of the ongoing state violence they face.

Today, on Eelam Tamil Women's Day, which marks the 36th death anniversary of 2nd Lt. Malathy, the first female LTTE fighter to die in combat, PEARL remembers the sacrifices made by Tamil women, from those who resisted state oppression decades ago to those who continue the fight today for Tamil rights, justice, accountability, and self-determination.