

Adayaalam Centre for Policy Research (ACPR)

Statement: Impunity persists for Enforced Disappearances in Sri Lanka

August 30, 2023

Jaffna, Sri Lanka - On this International Day of Victims of Enforced Disappearance, we stand in solidarity with the Families of the Disappeared in Sri Lanka, most of whom were disappeared by the Sri Lankan state and whose disappearances have yet to be accounted for.

Fourteen years since the end of the armed conflict, the Tamil Families of the Disappeared in the North-East are still fighting for truth, justice, and accountability. Their continuous protests have now been ongoing for over 2380 days despite surveillance and harassment, inclement weather, a worsening economic crisis, and physical and psychological strains. While these families are inspiring and keep the hope for justice and accountability alive, their protests are also a heartbreaking reminder of how callous the Sri Lankan government is, choosing to continue to deny them long overdue answers. This is even more so considering that over 180 of the protestors have died without learning what happened to their disappeared loved ones.

The Sri Lankan government continues to prevent and deny truth and justice for the victims of enforced disappearance. The Office of Missing Persons and the Office for Reparations, established allegedly to investigate enforced disappearance and provide reparations to victims' families, respectively, have not only been utter failures but also contributed to re-traumatizing families. Bereft of trust and confidence in the government, the victims' families and the victim-survivor community in general rightfully view the proposed National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, another domestic-mechanism to achieve 'truth', with complete incredulity.

Although the new mass grave discovered at Kokkuthoduvaï has reminded the international community and other stakeholders of the gravity of the issue and the need for impartial mechanisms to address it, the way in which it is being handled by the government is alarming. The exhumation is set to be done without the involvement of international agencies or impartial observation as victims have demanded and in utter disregard of the Bournemouth Protocol on Mass Grave Protection and Investigation and other guidelines issued by the International Commission on Missing Persons. This raises concerns that this mass grave will be improperly investigated like many in the past.

We at the Adayaalam Centre for Policy Research on this day stand in solidarity with the Families of the Disappeared who persist in their demand for truth, justice and accountability and reaffirm our commitment to fighting towards achieving justice for those that disappeared. We also urge that the exhumation of Kokkuthoduvaï and other mass graves discovered be done in accordance with international standards and with impartial international expert observation. Cries of the Families of the Disappeared have gone ignored by the Sri Lankan government for far too long. It is long overdue that their suffering is taken seriously and genuine measures are undertaken to investigate and provide truth and justice for the tens of thousands who have been forcibly disappeared.