

25<sup>th</sup> May, 2017

**The Right to memorialisation of Tamils & harassment of Tamil activist leading memorialisation**

We, the undersigned individuals and organisations, strongly condemn the continued police harassment of Rev. Fr. Elil Rajendram, a Tamil Catholic Priest belonging to the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), based in Mullaithivu, Northern Sri Lanka.

Many of us have met and know of Fr. Elil through his human rights activism. He has been working with Tamil war survivors and families of victims, supporting their struggles and advocating for their rights. He is known for his engagement and collaboration with Sinhalese activists from other parts of Sri Lanka, inviting and hosting them in the North, and often travelling down to Colombo for dialogues. He has also been engaging with the international community and the government. Last year, he had served as the district Chairperson of the Zonal Task Force of the Consultation Task Force on Reconciliation Mechanisms, an initiative of the Sri Lankan government.

Fr. Elil was instrumental in organizing a memorial service in Mullivaikkaal on 18<sup>th</sup> May, the day and place Sri Lanka's three decade long war came to a bloody end. This year, the memorial involved families carving names of their loved ones who had been killed in the war on stones, and placing them by a monument that was placed there on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May last year. Carving of names on stones was a way for family members to remember their killed loved ones, especially as most had no grave.

During the preparations, the organizers were subjected to regular surveillance and intimidation. Fr. Elil and the youth hired to inscribe names on the stones, were then summoned and questioned by the Police on 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> May respectively. He was summoned to the Police again on 22<sup>nd</sup> May, but was told by a senior police officer not to report to the police, but that the investigation would continue, implying that he would be subjected to continued scrutiny. A consistent demand of the police has been a full list of the names that were, and were to be carved on the stones. In the meantime, on 17<sup>th</sup> May, the police had obtained a Court Order stopping Fr. Elil and others from holding the memorial event at the pre-planned site in Mullivaikkaal. Though the Order was challenged in the court, the courts didn't allow the event to go ahead as planned, and only allowed a memorial event to be held in the nearby church.

At the same time, the Sri Lankan government had organized a memorial service for "war heroes" on 19<sup>th</sup> May, in Colombo, with the patronage of the President. This was following a series of such events throughout the country, during the month of May, which had been named "War Heroes Month".

The policy and practice of the present and former governments towards remembrance of the war dead and memorialisation is blatantly discriminatory towards Tamils, both dead and alive. This is a real obstacle towards peace and unity, and if continued, would only add to further polarisation and mistrust.

We affirm that all persons and communities have a right to cry and grieve for family and community members killed, to erect monuments, privately and publicly, individually and collectively. For many families and friends whose loved ones were killed, this is a way to heal their painful past, and move towards the future.

Thus, we appreciate and fully support the work of Fr. Elil and others, towards the realisation of this universal right, which is a crucial element of transitional justice and reconciliation. We express

our solidarity to them in the context of intimidation, threats and reprisals from the government that they are current facing. We see their work as crucial towards reconciliation and co-existence, and commit to support them.

We call on the government to ensure the right to remember and memorialisation of all communities, and stop the persecution of Fr. Elil and others working to realise and promote this right. We condemn the anti-reconciliation policies and actions of the government, extend solidarity and stand by Fr. Elil and others facing persecution, and extend our fullest support to them to continue their important work.

## **Signatories:**

### **Individuals**

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7. Anthonyaiah Everest Dias CMF
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10. Bishop Duleep de Chickera
11. Bishop Kumara Illangasinghe
12. C. Kangatheran
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21. Dinal Edirisinghe
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23. Dr. Maureen Ernest
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26. E. Jayasree - India
27. Emil van der Poorten - A supporter of human and civic rights for ALL
28. Farah Mihlar
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30. Francis Xavier – India
31. Fred Carver
32. Freddy Gamage – Editor, Meepura
33. George Mathen - India
34. George Pulikuthiyil - India
35. Hamshi Karunarajah
36. Herman Kumara

37. Hilary Wirasinha - Diocese of Colombo
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53. Kumaran Nadesan
54. Kusumam Joseph - India
55. Lakshan Dias - Christian Rights Front
56. Leslie Augustin
57. Logan Rasiah
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66. Melisha Yapa
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68. Mohammed Thahir Kubais - Social Activists, Mullaithivu
69. N. N. Gokuldas - India
70. Nagulan Nesiah
71. Nigel Nugawela
72. Nilshan Fonseka
73. Nirmanusan Balasundaram
74. Nishanthini Stalin George - Women Activist
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78. P.M. Mujeebur Rahman - Journalist and Human Rights Defender
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80. Parakrama Niriella - Dramatist
81. Paul Joseph Kattookaren - India
82. Prathibha Perera
83. Prof. Jayantha Seneviratne
84. Prof. Kumar David - LSSP (MG) - Signing in a personal capacity
85. Ralston Weinman
86. Rev. Bro. Jurinesz R. Shadrach - Church of Ceylon, Diocese of Colombo
87. Rev. Bro. Marious Croos

88. Rev. Bro. Shabilaash
89. Rev. Dr. Jayasiri T. Peiris - Principal, Theological College of Lanka, Pilimatalawa
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91. Rev. Fr. A.A. Surendrakumar, CMF
92. Rev. Fr. Aloysius Pieris, SJ
93. Rev. Fr. Chandran Crispus
94. Rev. Fr. F.J.G. Croos (Nehru)
95. Rev. Fr. J.C. Paul Rohan
96. Rev. Fr. Jeevantha Peiris
97. Rev. Fr. Jeevaraj Thangarasa, SJ
98. Rev. Fr. Jeyabalan Croos
99. Rev. Fr. Lionel Peiris, SSF (Society of St. Francis - Anglican Franciscans)
100. Rev. Fr. M. V. E. Ravichandran
101. Rev. Fr. Manoj Rasanjana, OP (Order of Preachers)
102. Rev. Fr. Nandana Manatunga
103. Rev. Fr. Nandana Saparamadu
104. Rev. Fr. Niroshan de Mel
105. Rev. Fr. Oswald Firth, OMI
106. Rev. Fr. Pan Jordan
107. Rev. Fr. Reid Shelton Fernando
108. Rev. Fr. Rohan Dominic
109. Rev. Fr. S.D.P. Selvan
110. Rev. Fr. Sarath Iddamalgodu - Christian Solidarity Movement
111. Rev. Fr. Sherard Jayawardane
112. Rev. Fr. Terence Fernando
113. Rev. Jason J. Selvaraja - Assembly of God, Chavakachcheri
114. Rev. Maxwell Doss
115. Rev. Sr. Beatrice Fernando, SDS
116. Rev. Sr. Jenita Ragel
117. Rev. Sr. Jeyam
118. Rev. Sr. Matilda Lazarus
119. Rev. Sr. Naomi
120. Rev. Sr. Nichola
121. Rev. Sr. Noel Christine Fernando
122. Rev. Sr. Patricia Sandana Savary, SDS
123. Rev. Sr. Rajeswary Arokianathar, SDS
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138. Shenali De Silva

139. Shiran Illanperuma
140. Shreen Abdul Saroor
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150. Thyagi Ruwanpathirana
151. Udaya Kalupathirana
152. V. Jemstan Loga
153. Y. Perera
154. Yasmin Sooka

### **Organisations**

155. Centre for Police Alternatives (CPA)
156. Families of the Disappeared (FoD)
157. Human Rights Office, Kandy (HRO)
158. INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre
159. International Truth and Justice Project (ITJP)
160. Mannar Social and Economic Development Organization
161. National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL)
162. National Fisheries Solidarity Organization (NAFSO)
163. Sri Lanka Campaign (SLC)