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Northern Provincial Council

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Threats against witnesses of Human rights violations and Tamil civil society activists and the prevalent atmosphere of Sri Lankan government surveillance of the Tamil people remain rampant, and it has deterred the people of North and East from engaging with the OISL evidence-process which the Colombo government deems as a conspiracy against the Sri Lankan State.

To this effect military operatives and unidentified squads have been behind attacks and threats against Tamils who engage with human rights activities.

The government has also recently enhanced the blockade of information from North to the OISL and the outside world, by banning foreigners and tourist visa holders from entering the North. The travellers to North have to be screened by the Sri Lankan Ministry of Defence (MoD) in Colombo in order to get access. This seriously affects the ability of the people of the North to communicate with the OHCHR and the international community.

Information regarding the process of submitting evidence to the OISL has not been allowed to be properly communicated to the people in the North and East; likewise the military has enforced a tight control of information pertaining to the international





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inquiry. These have had the effect of leaving little space and time to enlighten the Tamil people about Human rights violations and the international inquiry.

As the Sri Lankan government has decided to not co-operate with the OISL, it has also led to enhanced surveillance and intimidation against the Tamils and in particular Tamil civil society and human rights activists in fear of them working with the former. There has been a spate of attacks against Tamils working for the unlawfully detained and the enforced disappearances of Tamils. Journalists have also been subjected to attacks and investigation-style threats.

The Human rights investigation presided over by the OHCHR is not communicated properly to the people due to the imposed restrictions and surveillance by government and the Sri Lankan military, and due to it the people whom I have been in touch with have been made to believe that only if they have documented evidence of papers, they can submit their cases to the OISL inquiry. There has not been an understanding among the people that their eyewitness-accounts are satisfactory to be submitted in writing. The IT knowledge among the people is also very limited.

It is therefore important to sensitize the people on this account; likewise it is also imperative to ensure the safety of those brave ones who come forth in this manner. Previously whenever the UNHRC sessions took place in Geneva or some other international event scrutinizing Sri Lanka is held, the Tamils on the ground have faced intensified persecution, attacks and threats. This have in effect contributed to an atmosphere of fear and insecurity which prohibits the people from communicating their grievances and witness statements to the outside world.

In contrast, documentation of land grabs are grasped by many as it they hold in many cases the possibility to produce documents and land deeds which can document their case and there is the palpable hope that it can be used to retrieve land which has been forcefully appropriated.





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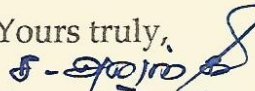
The eyewitness procedure is not fully understood by the affected people and thus it demands a process of awareness making and education in order to prepare the people for such an endeavor. Even when the people of the North and East engaged the local commissions, eyewitness accounts were limited due to the lack of awareness and the prevailing atmosphere of fear and intimidation under a heavily militarized presence.

The Ban on foreigners and tourists witness enhances thus the prevailing situation.

As scores of potential witnesses have no facilities or resources to engage with the OISL process, more time and space as well as the security of the people and witnesses concerned needs to be guaranteed by the UN in order to enhance the process of information flowing from the North and East and the UNHRC.

On behalf of the people, both in North and East, I am urging the OISL deadline to be extended by a month – or at least to the extent possible – in order to comply with the requirements and conditions on the ground. Only then can it be an inquiry of satisfactory nature which genuinely intends to facilitate for the people on ground to participate despite the Sri Lankan governments prohibitions and counter measures.

Yours truly,

  
Ananthi Sasitharan  
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