

INTERNATIONAL  
TRUTH  
AND JUSTICE  
PROJECT

**Press Release: Where mourning the dead is banned**

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**Johannesburg:** The International Truth and Justice Project condemns the recent ban by the Government of Sri Lanka on the commemorations of the dead by Tamil families in Mullivaikkal and calls upon the Government to lift the ban immediately.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:**  
YASMIN SOOKA

A court order in Tamil from the District Judge and Magistrate of Mullaitivu has placed a 14 day ban from this evening on all ceremonies near the Catholic Church in Mullivaikkal East, on the grounds that they may adversely affect “the country’s integrity, national security and the peace of the nation”.

*“Remembering the dead is a fundamental right of the culture of every people and begs the question of how weeping parents, remembering their loved ones, can threaten national security?”* commented the executive director of the International Truth and Justice Project, Yasmin Sooka. *“The ban on the basis of national security is based on spurious grounds and is a sign of the ongoing repression and militarisation that continues to affect the Tamil community in the north and east of the island. It is also a call to action to human rights activists in the whole country to oppose this outrageous action.”*

Families in Mullivaikkal, the last place to be captured by the Sri Lankan army in May 2009, have this year started carving stones with the names of their dead, including children and the elderly. They had planned to place those stones in a field adjacent to St Paul’s Church in Mullivaikkal on the anniversary of the end of the war but are now banned from doing so. In recent days, villagers have faced blatant intimidation by police – many received phone calls from officers of the Criminal Investigation Department asking for information about events planned for 18 May. In addition, three uniformed police officers and a truck have been stationed outside the venue of the commemoration. The stone carver was summoned to the police station on

Tuesday to make a statement and has been asked to hand over a list of the names of the dead.

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*“The right to mourn is integral to being human” said Ms Sooka, “and memorialization is supposed to be a central element of the transitional justice programme that the Government of Sri Lanka has committed to but so far failed to implement”.*

The ITJP has called on the Government of Sri Lanka to release the names of those who surrendered to the military on 18 May 2009 and to confirm whether they are dead or alive. If they are alive in custody they should either be charged or released. Tamil families have been protesting in recent months for information about what happened to their loved ones.

*“The mothers of the disappeared have literally spent months on the roadside trying in vain to get the attention of the Government and the international community and it is a matter of shame that they have not been treated with more respect and dignity,” said Ms. Sooka, “they need answers.*

International law clearly recognizes the right to know about the circumstances of serious violations of victims’ human rights and about who was responsible.

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