

INTERNATIONAL  
TRUTH  
AND JUSTICE  
PROJECT

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The International Day of the Disappeared.

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**Press Release: Raped and Tortured for Collecting the Names of the Disappeared.**

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:**  
YASMIN SOOKA

**Johannesburg:** Young Tamil activists have been abducted, tortured and raped because of their involvement in the search for the truth about the disappeared in Sri Lanka. At least fifteen such victims have been granted refugee status in the UK alone since 2015.

*"More than a decade after the war end, young Tamils, many of whom have siblings who disappeared in the war, have paid a terrible price for asking for the truth,"* said the executive director of the International Truth and Justice Project, Yasmin Sooka. *"On the International Day of the Disappeared, we remind the Sri Lankan state that it cannot continue to persecute and send white vans after those who just want to know what happened to their loved ones."*

The refugees in the UK were not prominent human rights figures – they were young people who collected names or helped with protests or assisted the families of the disappeared to register complaints. None had any idea of the grave risks they were taking – one said he was even told that because he was a teenager the army wouldn't be interested in him. In detention they experienced brutal torture at the hands of the security forces, such as whipping of the soles of the feet, blows to sexual organs, cigarette burns, branding with a heated metal rod, water torture, asphyxiation, suspension in stress positions, mock executions and death threats, as well as rape, including gang rape.

*"In the process of demanding justice, which they are entitled to, these families have been victimized multiple times – the responsibility lies fully with a State that has no interest in recovering the truth,"* said Ms Sooka.

The ITJP's [Disappearance Website](#) is a repository that contains the names and photographs of 340 Tamils who are alleged to have disappeared in state custody on or around the 18 May 2009. There are numerous eyewitness abroad who witnessed their surrender to the Sri Lankan Army.

Astonishingly military generals, including the current Army Commander, Shavendra Silva<sup>1</sup>, who were present at the surrenders have never once been questioned even by the Office of Missing Persons<sup>2</sup> about their knowledge of what happened to the hundreds of people who disappeared, including 29 children. In May 2018, the ITJP wrote to the Office of Missing Persons saying the 18 May disappeared should be the first case they investigate and the first step would be to question military figures like Shavendra Silva and Jagath Jayasuriya<sup>3</sup> whom eyewitnesses say personally observed the 18 May surrenders.

*"It is a travesty that hundreds of people<sup>4</sup> can disappear on one day in one location and after more than a decade nobody in the military has even been questioned. Instead those who demand justice are further victimised,"* said Ms. Sooka.

*"The international community now has a moral responsibility to the families who demanded justice, thinking there would be a transitional justice process. Instead of lining up to shake hands with politicians and generals to express their support for the new government, diplomats in Colombo should be photographed with the Families of the Disappeared and their brave lawyers to champion their quest for the truth and show their continued support,"* she added.

Appallingly, displaying absolute contempt for the victims, the Media Minister, Kehilya Rambukwella, reportedly<sup>5</sup> said that the individuals in half of the complaints to the Office of Missing Persons (OMP) in Sri Lanka were actually living abroad. The OMP reported to the UN that it had 14,641 files on individuals and had received an additional 129 new complaints<sup>6</sup>.

*"The Minister needs to be called out for his unsubstantiated comments which constitute abuse of the Families of the Disappeared, whose interminable suffering is dismissed in the most callous and disrespectful fashion. How is it possible more than seven thousand people<sup>7</sup> went abroad and didn't bother to contact their children or mothers? What purpose would it serve for families in Sri Lanka to report them missing when*

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<sup>1</sup> Designated in the USA: <https://www.state.gov/public-designation-due-to-gross-violations-of-human-rights-of-shavendra-silva-of-sri-lanka-under-section-7031c-of-the-department-of-state-foreign-operations-and-related-programs-appropriations-a/>

ITJP Dossier: <http://www.itjpsl.com/reports/shavendra-silva>

<sup>2</sup> 18 May 2018, ITJP Press release, <https://itjpsl.com/assets/press/English-15-May-2018-Itjp-Press-release-Disappearance-Website-english.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Jagath Jayasuriya Latin America Case: <https://itjpsl.com/reports/the-case-against-jagath-jayasuriya>

<sup>4</sup> 12 Dec 2018, Joint Press Release with HRDAG, New study estimates 500 Tamils disappeared in Army custody in Sri Lanka after surrendering at the end of the war in 2009. <https://itjpsl.com/assets/press/12-December-2018-Press-release-with-HRDAG-copy.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.tamilmirror.lk/பிரசித்த-செய்தி/The-missing-persons-can-not-be-searched/150-254744>

<sup>6</sup> A/HRC/42/40/Add.1, 10 Sep 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Half of 14641+129.

*this just brings surveillance and harassment<sup>8</sup> from the authorities?"*  
asked Ms. Sooka.

I [REDACTED]  
T [REDACTED]  
J [REDACTED]  
P [REDACTED]

Ends.

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<sup>8</sup> "However, the Working Group notes that civil society organisations do not appear to be aware of such commitments and is extremely concerned by continuing reports of surveillance, threats, intimidation, harassment of relatives of the disappeared and calls on the Government to take urgent action to address these, including investigation of previous and new cases and the prosecution of perpetrators." WGEID, *ibid*, §9.

