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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Joint written statement* submitted by the Association Bharathi Centre Culturel Franco-Tamoul, the Alliance Creative Community Project, the ANAJA (L'Eternel a répondu), the Association Burkinabé pour la Survie de l'Enfance, the Association Mauritanienne pour la promotion du droit, the Association pour les Victimes Du Monde, the Association Solidarité Internationale pour l'Afrique (SIA), L'Observatoire Mauritanien des Droits de l'Homme et de la Démocratie, the Society for Development and Community Empowerment, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[15 May 2017]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).



Occupation of Civilian Land by the Sri Lankan Navy and refusal to deny access to the rightful owners*

Nearly 40% of land belonging to the Tamils in the North and East is forcibly occupied by the Sri Lankan armed forces. In Kilinochchi District of Northern Sri Lanka, a number of public as well as private buildings and lands have been occupied and used for the establishment of military camps. One such place is the Iranatheevu islands which were initially occupied by the Army, then the Navy and closed off for civilian resettlement.

As a result of the conflict, of the 314 displaced families, a few have received houses at Iranamanagar. As they are mostly fishermen, these people want to resettle in their own village in order to engage in their chosen livelihood¹. The sea around the island is rich in a variety of sea food and sea cucumber which fetch a good price in the International market. They had left the island during 1992-1994 period.

The residents of Peratheevu (Iranatheevu North Island) were displaced in 1992 and were neither allowed to resettle by the LTTE when it controlled the island nor the Government after they captured the island. For over a decade they have been living in a relocation village on the mainland, Iranamanagar for which many families have permits dating from 1995 onwards. They were displaced more than 10 times during the last phase of the civil war which ended in May 2009.

Following the end of the war they were resettled in Iranamanagar in November 2009 but they have not been allowed to return to Iranatheevu. The economic livelihood of the community is still limited, especially for the women who used to earn a livelihood by wading into the shallow waters off the coast and collecting sea cucumbers. The residents have not received any official notification as to whether they will be allowed to return and what will happen to their properties, even though some residents claimed that they have deeds.

In addition to the navy, the police has also occupied individual buildings. Many families have reportedly lost their documents, including the deeds from Iranatheevu and permits from Iranamanagar. The Navy had stationed its men there and maintaining a Radar centre.

One of the main Christian churches known as Sebamale Matha Shrine is situated in the island. Since January 2010, However, the residents from Iranatheevu have been allowed to conduct only the annual church festivals but not maintenance of the Church or conduct regular prayer services.

The civilians are not entitled to visit the island. Those days the government cited the LTTE as the reason for evicting the civilians. Now the war is over and there are no LTTE activities. Yet the rightful owners of the lands in that island are denied their right to visit their native place.

Each island has a main church and a corresponding festival, January for the Siratheevu and October for the Peratheevu.

On February 8th 2017, the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Mr. Ranil Wickremasinghe, told the House that the government would not release the Iranatheevu island situated eight nautical miles off Kilinochchi coast to resettle its original dwellers as the Navy has pointed out the need of the land for security purposes².

Following this the people of Iranatheevu have been protesting since the beginning of May 2017 with a just demand to return to their places of origin or at the least, seeking permission from the government to have full access to their erstwhile homes and to start fishing activities around the island.

This is a willful denial of livelihood to the Tamils, there are a number of more strategic Sinhala and Muslim villages along the coastline in the West and East, but the government has not dared to touch them. This act of the government to deny access of land to its owners, who happen to be Tamils is a form of structural genocide perpetrated by successive Sinhala governments who have failed to reconcile with Tamils by denying them justice. How can a fisherman be resettled in an agricultural village is the question the displaced Tamil civilians ask.

Though the civil war ended more than eight years ago, the many decades old displacement of the civilians continues as a result of the apathy of the Sinhala governments which are against any form of demilitarisation and prevent any normalization of the situation in the Tamil areas.

As a Member of Parliament representing these people.

1. I strongly urge the UNHRC to work out a time frame to settle the land related issues of the Tamils.
2. Allow access to the land of rightful owners.
3. Demilitarize the North and East, in order to impose confidence among the Tamils that the process of reconciliation has started.
4. Allow the people of Iranatheevu to access their land and religious places.
5. Allow the fishermen to fish around the islands of Iranatheevu which are rich in marine resources.
6. Fully implement the UNHRC resolution 30/1 passed in October 2015.
7. Take a serious note of the OCHR report on Sri Lanka and implement it.

Sivagnanam Shritharan
Member of Parliament
Tamil Rights Activist
Sri Lanka

Sivagnanam Shritharan is a two time sitting Member of Parliament representing the Jaffna and Killinochchi electoral districts. He was a Principal of the Government College in Killinochchi before the ending of the civil war in 2009. After the war ended he was put in the Manik farm camps and in 2010 he contested the parliamentary elections and became an outspoken critic of the Mahinda Rajapakse government. The then government attempted to kill him and he escaped. In the 2015 parliamentary elections he secured the highest preferential votes in the North and East and was elected for the second time.

*Association Le Collectif La Paix au Sri Lanka, NGO without consultative status, also shares the views expressed in this statement.

¹ <http://archive2.srilankamirror.com/news/item/3484-iranativu-residents-want-to-resettle-in-own-land>

² http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=159995