



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

Fifty-fourth session

11 September–13 October 2023

Agenda item 2

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner  
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the  
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

**Joint written statement\* submitted by Action Sri Lanka,  
Association Bharathi Centre Culturel Franco-Tamoul,  
Association pour les Victimes Du Monde, Tamil Uzhagam,  
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.

[23 August 2023]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



## **Sri Lanka's Genocidal War against Eelam Tamils: Case of the Navaly Church Massacre**

On 9 July 1995, the Sri Lankan air force dropped 13 bombs on St Peter's Church in Navaly. More than 140 sheltering Tamils, who were encouraged by the military to seek refuge at the church, were killed on the spot. At least 13 children were amongst the dead, with many more succumbing to injuries later as the local hospital was swamped with the wounded.

At approximately 4:30 pm on July 9, 1995, the St Peter's Church in Navaly and the nearby Sri Kathirgama Murugan Kovil, which were both sheltering displaced Tamils from army bombardment, was attacked.

### **Bombs Rolling in the Air**

Eyewitnesses report seeing cluster bombs dropped in the church compound. Ch. S. and his then five-year-old brother S. were at their home adjacent to the church on the morning of the attack and recall seeing aircraft circling the region.

"Before I could run bombs began falling," recalled S., years later. "Suddenly there was a tremendous explosion. That is all I remember till I woke up in hospital". He has lost his sight completely in the attack. His mother was killed in their home.

Testimonies collected by the ICRC are reproduced below:

"Pragasam Rajendran (M) 73 years - was just at the entrance of his house which is adjacent to the church premises. Had seen the plane. His wife Nageswary stayed next to him and saw 'the bombs rolling in the air like pamphlets'. He had started shouting and alerted the others to lie down. As the wife laid down, she heard the first explosion and continuously some more.'

Anthony Manuelpillai (M) 73 years - who came to the church premises to fetch water from the well had seen the plane at a very low altitude and saw the bombs falling 'like rolling papers'.

J. J.(M) 17 years - was at a junction which is nearly 100 yards from the church premises. He had seen clusters of white objects moving towards him. As the plane passed over him blaring, he said he lied down and heard a series of explosions around the church area.

Antonythas Arulammah (F) 40 years - who was near the school building inside the church premises had seen the plane dropping something without diving downwards. She said she lied down after someone nearby alerted her for falling bombs.

Velupillai Arulammah (M) 59 years - he saw the plane dropping bombs while he was cooking meals for the displaced people inside the church compound.

George Theva (F) 45 years - was standing on the road outside the church premises. She had seen the plane dropping some objects like 'big watermelon'.

Father James (M) - was at St.Anthony's Church, Manipay during the incident. He saw one plane and about 6 bombs falling one after another."

### **Reaction**

According to eye-witness accounts, this church and several adjacent buildings were hit by further air force strikes at 4.30 p.m. the same day. During the attack 65 people were killed and 150 wounded, including women and children. That evening and into the night Sri Lanka Red Cross staff evacuated most of the wounded by ambulance to the Jaffna Teaching Hospital. Delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) present the next morning at the scene of the attack noted the widespread damage and measured the extent of the tragedy: many of the bodies had not yet been removed from the rubble.

- International Committee of the Red Cross Communication to the Press No.95/30 (11 July 1995)

"Thirteen babies were among the 65 dead found under the rubble of a Catholic church bombed by the Sri Lankan air force, an International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) official said on Tuesday.

The military, which said it was not aware of any church being bombed, had dropped leaflets warning civilians in the rebel-held peninsula to seek refuge in temples and churches to minimise the chance of death or injury in air strikes.

"This is really a violation of humanitarian law if a civilian area has been deliberately targeted," Henry said, adding that he had no information on whether the attack was deliberate or an accident.

- Reuters (11 July 1995)

"Pope John Paul said on Wednesday he was suffering along with the families of people killed when air force bombs hit a church in Sri Lanka.

"I want to express my deep-felt sharing in the suffering of so many people involved in the ethnic conflict that is tearing Sri Lanka apart," he told pilgrims and tourists at his weekly general audience. "I share the grief of those who lost their loved ones in the bombing of the church and school of Navali," he added.

- Reuters (12 July 1995)

I very much regret to report to you the tragic killings of innocent civilian refugees who had gathered at the above Church on the instruction of your Defence Ministry.

A 'Pukkara' Air Craft had dropped a cluster of many bombs on this crowd of refugees who had taken shelter in the church resulting in the death of over 65 civilians including women and children and over 150 were seriously injured sustaining the loss of limbs.

Besides many were rendered homeless as many houses were razed to the ground and others heavily damaged, including our church and priest's house. All the people in this village have fled to safer areas as refugees.

Therefore we very earnestly appeal to Your Excellency to kindly instruct your forces to desist from bombing, strafing, artillery rocked attacks on civilian targets like Kovils, Churches, Schools and Hospitals."

- Time Magazine (31 July 1995)

"St.Peters Church in Navaly and the adjoining St.Peter's School where hundreds had sought shelter were badly gutted. 56 bodies were retrieved from the debris, many of whom were women and children. The final death toll in Navaly was about 120. Rescue workers have reported that torn limbs and pieces of human flesh were strewn over the area."

## Background

The bombing took place on the first day of the Sri Lankan military's 'Operation Leap Forward', a large-scale military offensive against the positions of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) north of the city of Jaffna to retake the Jaffna peninsula.

In the preceding weeks, the Sri Lankan air force had dropped leaflets across the region, instructing Tamil civilians to seek shelter at churches and temples as the military offensive began.

The war effort was being led by then Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga. Negotiations she had entered into with the LTTE had broken down, and when the war resumed in July 1995, the Sri Lankan armed forces had rearmed and expanded, acquiring helicopter gunships, heavier artillery and armour, as well as re-deploying troops from the eastern province into the Jaffna peninsula ahead of a new military project.

'I have no blood on my hands' – Chandrika

The Sri Lankan government initially denied any knowledge of the bombing, before attempting to blame the LTTE for the killings.

As the scale of the massacre became clear, then Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar lashed out at the ICRC for releasing information on the attack. Members of the ICRC who attempted to protest the attack were reportedly summoned to Sri Lanka's foreign office.

Meanwhile, Kumaratunga told reporters that "it was probably the work of the LTTE who were firing mortar shells in that direction."

"The ICRC says all kinds of things," Reuters quoted her as saying. "There was fighting three kilometers northwest of Navali, so it was unlikely any action by the security forces would have affected the church or its environs."

## **Remembering the massacred**

The ICRC compiled a list of 108 names that they identified as having been killed in the aftermath of the massacre. At least 37 children are amongst the dead.

28 years on from the massacre, no one has been held accountable for the killings.

## **Recommendation**

- a. Take immediate measures to demilitarize North and East Sri Lanka
- b. Endorse the Tamil genocide resolution of 2015 passed by the Northern Provincial Council in February 2015.
- c. Refer Sri Lanka to The ICC,
- d. Perpetrators of war crimes, crimes of genocides and crimes against humanity must be investigated and brought to international justice process.
- e. Council Members to have a new Resolution under Agenda 4 to appoint a special Rapporteur to monitor and investigate ongoing human rights violations and repression against the Tamil people.
- f. To the 4th committee members of General Assembly: To recognize that Tamil Territories are not Governing by Tamils
- g. conducting an internationally monitored Referendum.
- h. We call on the European Commission to stop being complicit in the genocide against the Tamil people and to suspend all aid and benefits such as the Generalized System of Preferences Plus (GSP+) granted to Sri Lanka.
- i. OHCHR's successive reports don't mention "Tamils" who are the victims of genocide in Sri Lanka, we therefor request you to investigate this omission and to mention the appropriate word of "TAMILS" wherever it's needful.

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Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappearance Vavuniya district, Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappearance Mannar district, Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappearance Trincomalee district, Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappearance Kilinochchi district, Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappearance Mullaithivu district, Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappearance Jaffna, Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappearance Batticaloa district, Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappearance Amaparai district, Alliance internationale contre le génocide, ALLIANCE INTERNATIONALE CONTRE LE GENOCIDE DES TAMOULS, Alliance Internationale de Défense des Droits Humains, ALLIANCE INTERNATIONALE DES JOURNALISTES, Association Internationale Contre les Disparitions forcées, GLOBAL TAMIL MOUVEMENT, Gouvernement en Exil du Tamil Eelam, INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR RIGHT TO SELF DETERMINATION, NGO(s) without

consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.