



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

### Fifty-fourth session

11 September–13 October 2023

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Association caritative étudiante pour la jeunesse, a non-governmental organization 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.



## Militarization of Tamil Eelam: Case of Iranatheevu

Iranatheevu (North and South), is Sri Lanka's second largest island situated off the North West of the mainland and is predominantly Roman Catholic. The small island had some public amenities such as a post-office, co-operative society, village council, Iranatheevu Roman Catholic Mixed School, Sarana Society, Sewa Society, St. Sebastian's Society, St. Joseph (Soosaiappa) Youth Society and a Base Hospital & staff quarters, but was dependent on the mainland for basic supplies such as food staples and services. The island's residents relied on fishing, but the surrounding reef and deep sea proved lucrative during the season, but during the off season, some family members worked on the mainland.

In 1992, 225 families from Iranatheevu, a self-sufficient island in Northern Sri Lanka, fled their homes due to the intensification of the war. It was subsequently occupied by the Navy, who remain there to this day.

Over the decades, some families fled to South India, some settled in a village in the mainland, while others lived with relatives and host families in the vicinity. This site has been treated as a de facto relocation site by the authorities and is called Iranaimatha Nagar after their island home. According to residents, the Navy is in occupation of two of the people's houses and the rest of the navy camp has been constructed out of prefabricated housing material on their lands. Three years after the war in 2012, upon requesting special permission from the Navy, the villagers were permitted to visit their island to celebrate their annual church feast, on about three occasions. However, since 2015, they had not been permitted to return to their home island. Currently, the people still must seek permission from the Navy to attend their annual church feast. The desire to return is for multiple reasons including the current economic hardships that families face. "We had more than enough to live on before. Now we are living like beggars", stated a villager.

Eight years following the end of the war, as the people were tired of waiting indefinitely, out of desperation, they started a continuous sit-in protest, on the beach in Iranaimatha Nagar, in May 2017. Having marked 99 days of continuous protest there, they shifted inland to their church premises on the 100th day, due to the onset of the monsoon rains. The sustained protest has raised the profile of their case, and state representatives have been forced to take note of this issue.

Two weeks following the start of the protest, the President, in a letter addressed to the people of Iranathivu, said that 2 acres of land would need to be allocated to the Navy, whilst the rest should be released back to the people. There has been no follow-up action to this letter.

On May 28, State Minister of Defense, Ruwan Wijewardena, visited them during their protest. He listened to their problem and told them that "he would discuss their issue with the Cabinet and the President, and get back to them with a resolve," said a villager. The Parish priest had later met Minister Wijewardena again in Mulangavil, and he had promised to investigate the issue.

In response to an appeal letter written by the Rural Development Society (RDS) of Iranaimatha, to the Additional Secretary to the President, Sunanda Kariyawasam, requesting the return of their lands, Mr. Kariyawasam had responded to the people in a letter dated August 9, 2017, which also marked the 100th day of their protest. In this letter, Mr. Kariyawasam has instructed the Secretary of the Ministry of Defense, to "take appropriate actions in this regard.... (and) to please inform the President of the Rural Development Society of Iranaimatha about the actions you may take in this regard."

Having had no further response from the government, the community has attempted to maintain pressure through multiple means, including continuing the protest, launching short demonstrations in front of state offices, appeal letters, and the blocking of a main highway. On the 29th day of their protest, 10 busloads of protestors met with the GA of Kilinochchi and handed over their demands to him as well. He had told them that he would forward their appeal to the authorities in Colombo. On the 54th day of their protest, the villagers blocked the main A32 highway for an hour, demanding a speedy resolution to their problem.

In October 2017, the Survey Department had visited Iranatheevu to survey the lands in question. The people had offered their assistance to help show the Survey staff their individual plots and boundaries, but, the Navy had not permitted the people to accompany the staff. “How can they survey our lands without us being there? We only know our lands,” complained one of the protestors.

Despite their protest, including blocking the main highway for a few hours, and having handed over a memorandum of demands to government officials, there was no concrete response from the State. Therefore, on April 23, 2018, the people of Iranatheevu (approx. 200 families) boarded boats bearing white flags and decided to take back their homes themselves. They returned to their island and camped out on their church premises until May 7th, when the government officially acknowledged the people’s return home.

Since their return, the people have begun to clear and clean up their lands and wells etc. and are slowly starting to rebuild their lives.

However, in recent times, entry to the island has been obstructed by the army. Currently, only fishermen, women and Catholic priests with a permit (to conduct Sunday services) are allowed to cross the island by boat. Children under the age of 17 are also not allowed. Also, the villagers are not allowed to build anything on the island and they are not allowed to take construction materials like cement to the island.

Iranativ Island is under the Punkari Divisional Division. And even the Divisional Secretary has been denied from the access to the Island by the Navy. Even now, the government forces, who are obstructing the improvement of the road system, are working to keep the places where they can easily get drinking water by force. Currently, there is no drinking water facility on the island. But due to obstruction by the Navy, the equipment is still rotting in the Irana Mata Cooperative Fishery Society building.

Militarization of Tamil’s traditional homeland is continuing, and Tamils’ historical identity is destroyed with the aim to change demography in favour of Sinhalese, using several government departments, including archaeological, forest, survey departments, and Ministry of Buddhasasana as well as Mahaveli River Development Agency. Also, Government-sponsored Sinhalese settlements are continuing.

Continuing land grab in Tamil’s traditional homeland by the Security Forces and the Government converting Tamil’s traditional and historical places into Sinhala-Buddhist areas by establishing numerous Buddhist temples in Tamil areas, including after destroying Hindu temples. As of now, around 2000 Hindu temples were affected by this act of the Government.

Sinhala – Buddhist Government continues to intimidate and abuse Tamil journalists who cover abuses against Tamils and Tamil Civil Society activists who protest these abuses. This not only violates their constitutionally guaranteed rights, it is being used to suppress Tamil’s calls for fundamental rights, including self-determination.

## Recommendations

- Short- and long-term resettlement assistance, including expenses pertaining to forest clearing, well cleaning/cutting and other related expenses
- Standardized housing assistance in-keeping with the current cost of building material and labor charges
- Free access to former fishing routes
- Renovate or rebuild public buildings and infrastructure – i.e. hospital, schools, churches, community halls, playground etc., and restore basic services
- Regular boat service between the island and the mainland
- Fair compensation for the long years of displacement and loss of income due to limited access to fishing and/or sale of cultivation/produce
- Take immediate measures to demilitarize North and East Sri Lanka

- Endorse the Tamil genocide resolution of 2015 passed by the Northern Provincial Council in February 2015.
- Refer Sri Lanka to The ICC,
- Perpetrators of war crimes, crimes of genocides and crimes against humanity must be investigated and brought to international justice process.
- 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.
- To the 4th committee members of General Assembly: To recognize that Tamil Territories are not Governing by Tamils
- conducting an internationally monitored Referendum.
- 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.
- 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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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.