

# URGENT ACTION

## PRIEST HARASSED OVER MEMORIAL TO WAR DEAD

**Sri Lankan priest, Father Elil Rajendram, is being harassed by the police over his efforts to help families memorialize their loved ones lost during the armed conflict.**

Father Elil Rajendram has been the subject of repeated police inquiries and harassment for his efforts to help families memorialize their loved ones lost during the armed conflict. A commemorative event to mark the eighth anniversary of the end of Sri Lanka's armed conflict was scheduled to take place on 18 May, near a monument erected previously by civil society activists near St. Paul's Church in Mullivaikkal East – an area in Sri Lanka's Northern provinces devastated by conflict. Local family members had carved stones with the names, ages and dates of loved ones' deaths to be placed in a field near the statue.

On the evening of 16 May, Father Elil was summoned for questioning by the Mullaitivu police. Police requested a ban on the planned gathering, claiming that the stones might include the names of members of the Liberation Tiger of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and thus pose a national security threat. On 17 May, the Mullaitivu Magistrate placed a two week ban on memorialization activities at the monument, ruling that they were a threat to "the country's integrity, national security and the peace of the nation." On 18 May, the Magistrate agreed to a scaled down event at St. Paul's Church, but denied public access to the stones. On 19 May, Father Elil, a Tamil speaker, was summoned to the police station in Vavuniya, about 75 kilometres from Mullaitivu, where he was made to sign a statement in Sinhala, a language he cannot read. Police pressed him to hand over a list of the names of the dead to be sent to the Terrorist Investigation Division (TID) for review to ensure that none of them had been members of the LTTE, and was asked whether he himself supported terrorism.

The third summons, issued on 20 May, directs Father Elil to report to the Special Crimes Division of the Mullaitivu Police on 22 May at 9:30 am "to attend an inquiry and submit a statement" regarding the statue and the carved stones. The police rescinded the order after a government Minister intervened, but the Deputy Inspector General of Police called Father Elil and again demanded the list of the names. If the authorities conclude that any LTTE members' names are on the stones, Father Elil risks arrest under Sri Lanka's draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act, where he'll be at risk of torture in police custody, which remains pervasive. Amnesty International is concerned about Father Elil's safety and also about undue restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression and association of families seeking to remember loved ones lost in Sri Lanka's armed conflict.

### 1) TAKE ACTION

**Write a letter, send an email, call, fax or tweet:**

- Stop the harassment of Father Elil and other activists and victims involved in efforts to remember those who died during Sri Lanka's armed conflict;
- Ensure families and human rights defenders are free to exercise their rights to freedom of expression and association, without fear of reprisal and in accordance to the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders;
- Reminding them that the Sri Lankan government has an obligation to deliver truth, justice, reparation to victims and to ensure non-recurrence of violations and calling on the government to permit and support memorialization as an integral part of any reparation mechanism.

**Contact these two officials by 6 July, 2017:**

Prime Minister

Ranil Wickremesinghe

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**Salutation: Dear Prime Minister**

Ambassador H.E. Mr. Prasad Kariyawasam, Embassy of the

Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

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**Salutation: Dear Ambassador**

### 2) LET US KNOW YOU TOOK ACTION

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The LTTE recruited heavily, and often forcibly from the Northern Province and many families lost loved ones to the group. Families, human rights defenders and civil society organizations have played a crucial role in promoting the rights to truth, justice and reparations. The affiliation of people who died during the conflict should be no reason to interfere with the work of families and human rights defenders working to preserve their memory.

The monument in question depicts a family displaced by fighting: a man carries an injured woman; a child walks at his side. For the eighth anniversary of the end of Sri Lanka's armed conflict, local family members had carved stones with the names, ages and dates of loved ones' deaths to be placed in a field near the statue.

Starting in early May, as the stones were being carved, Father Elil, the stone carver and other villagers reportedly received intimidating phone calls from intelligence personnel seeking information about the planned commemoration; at least one other civil society activist was picked up for questioning and police posted officers near the monument. Police also questioned Father Elil's parents in Jaffna.

Name: Father Elil Rajendram  
Gender m/f: m

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