

THE INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT AGAINST ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AND RACISM

**IMADR Oral Statement: 27<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council**

**Item 3: Interactive Dialogues with the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances**

12 September 2014

Thank you Mr. President,

We wish to express our appreciation to the comprehensive report provided by the Working Group, which also covers a wide range of challenges experienced by its members. We urge all the Governments concerned to cooperate fully with the Working Group to make this mechanism meaningful and responsive to victims and their families.

In Sri Lanka, family members of the disappeared and civil society organisations, which assist the families to continue their search and advocacy both nationally and internationally, continue to face harassments and intimidations by representatives from the various authorities. On 4th August 2014, a group of Buddhist monks and persons claiming to be representing the families of missing soldiers forcibly entered into the building of the Centre for Society and Religion located in a prominent church premise in Colombo. The group abused and threatened the organisers and the human rights defenders present at the meeting convened by the Families of the Disappeared and the Right to Life, which intended to share experiences of several family members of the disappeared from Mannar, Northern Sri Lanka. While the police received the complaints from two prominent civil society members regarding the disruption of the meeting, the police have failed to take any action against the hard-line Buddhist monks and the civilians who forcibly entered the premise and acted in a violent manner.

Since then, human rights defenders working on the issues related to disappearances continue to be harassed by various pro-Government forces. They are also exposed to threats by being continuously referred as traitors in the State-controlled media. A collective of International NGOs based in Geneva had reported the latest threats and intimidations faced by Sri Lankan human rights defenders to Your Excellency, Mr. President.

The President of Sri Lanka, His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, has announced the extension of the time period of the Commission to Investigate Missing Persons. Further five external experts have been appointed to advise the Commissioners, however the mandate or the role of these international advisors are not clear. In response to a question raised by an opposition Parliament Member regarding the status of the reports of the previous Commission and its accountability to the Parliament, the Chief Government Whip of Parliament informed that the President is not obliged to make the reports of the Commission public. It raises a serious question regarding the transparency and accountability of the Government of Sri Lanka concerning the disappeared persons.

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On 16th October 2006, the Working Group requested an invitation to undertake its official country visit to Sri Lanka. No positive response has yet been received from the Government for 8 years, in spite of reminders.

We urge the Government of Sri Lanka to take effective measures to ensure that family members of the disappeared and human rights defenders who support those families are free from reprisals, intimidations and harassments. We also call upon the Government to cooperate with the Working Group, and issue them an invitation to receive technical cooperation and assistance.

Thank you Mr. President.