

A COMMON AGENDA TO WORK AGAINST ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES IN SRI LANKA

Despite the end of the armed conflict in Sri Lanka in May 2009, many serious human rights issues remain unresolved. One of these is the issue of enforced disappearance, which IMADR places special focus in its UN advocacy work. In this context, the 95th session of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and the 1st session of the newly established Committee on Enforced Disappearances (the newest Treaty Body), both to be held in November 2011 in Geneva, Switzerland, are, among others, issues of great importance for lobbying and monitoring.

Meanwhile, in Sri Lanka, local groups organized a meeting on August 30, 2011, to commemorate the International Day of the Disappeared. Below is a report from IMADR Asia Committee.

In commemorating the International Day against Disappearances on August 30, 2011, civil society organizations, human rights activists and family members gathered at the National Trade Union conference hall in Rajagiriya to propose a common agenda to work against all forms of disappearances taking place in Sri Lanka.

The proceedings started with a one-minute moment of silence in honor of the disappeared, and the lighting of candles around an effigy that was a replica of one erected at Raddoluwa Junction in Seeduwa in memory of the disappeared.

The gathering was addressed by Bishop Kumara Illangasinghe, Tamil National Alliance MP M. Sumanthiran, lawyers and human rights activists Nimalka Fernando and Sudarshana Gunawardena, Brito Fernando, President of the Families of the Disappeared, and family members representing the disappeared persons from the North, East and South of the country. The Ambassador of Sweden, representatives from the UN and representatives from other foreign missions were present.

A group discussion was held to prepare a common agenda against enforced disappearances. The participants were divided into three groups, with the family members of the disappeared comprising one, and the civil society and human rights activists in the other two. The family members of the disappeared discussed the steps that can be taken in regard to the disappeared, while the civil society activists discussed what is meant by disappearances - why it happens and how can we activate ourselves to stop enforced disappearances. A number of long-term and short-term suggestions for stopping enforced disappearances were presented by the three groups.

Reaching a consensus, the group agreed to the following proposals: 1) to force the government to produce a list of persons who are imprisoned, 2) to pressurize the Human Rights Commission to produce a list of disappeared persons, 3) to document all the available information of the cases of the disappeared, 4) to file a *Habeas corpus* writ or legal action for selected cases of disappearances, 5) to enlighten the UN Human Rights Council about disappearance cases in Sri Lanka, and 6) to create a voice in civil society against all forms of disappearances. It was also suggested to use the latest technology to achieve these objectives.