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**One year after the disappearance of Rev. Fr. Jim Brown and Mr. Vimalathas:
Open letter to President Mahinda Rajapakse to establish truth and justice**

His Excellency Mahinda Rajapakse,
President of Sri Lanka

Your Excellency,

One year after Rev. Fr. Jim Brown and his helper Mr. Vimalathas, a father of 5 disappeared, after having been last seen at a Navy check point in Allaipiddy, Jaffna, more than 100 people from around the country came together at the Centre for Society and Religion (CSR) Colombo, yesterday, to honour their life and work, at an event organized by CASA and LST. Amongst the participants were friends and family members of Fr. Jim Brown, the Catholic Bishop of Jaffna, several Church leaders from the Catholic and other Churches from around the country, Religious Sisters, a member of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry to investigate into alleged grave human rights violations, Chairperson of the Civil Monitoring Commission and human rights defenders.

It was noted during the event, that Fr. Jim Brown was a young priest who had loved and served the people of the Allaipiddy parish selflessly. In the face of intense shelling on the night of 12th August 2006, he had offered the church as a place of refuge to people. However, breaking international humanitarian norms, the church had also been shelled in the early hours of 13th August, and more than 20 are reported as killed that night and many more injured. Having miraculously escaped death and injury himself, the next morning, Fr. Jim Brown was at the forefront in trying to lead the people, particularly the injured, to safety. He pleaded with the Navy to let the people leave. Reports indicate that he was later threatened by the Navy Commander of the area.

Some of the key points highlighted by those present at yesterday's event, including the Catholic Bishop of Jaffna were:

1. It is crucial to know the truth of what happened to Fr. Jim Brown and Vimalathas – if they are still alive, where are they, and even if not, what happened and who is responsible;
2. This case is only one amongst the hundreds of disappearances – in Jaffna and rest of the country and this state of affairs should not be allowed to continue;
3. Amongst the hundreds that have disappeared and been killed are several religious leaders in the North and East, as well as more than 50 humanitarian workers and it was stressed that they should be free to engage in their chosen missions;
4. The Bishop of Jaffna, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Sri Lanka and the Apostolic Nuncio appealed to you to find out the truth about Fr. Jim Brown and Mr. Vimalathas, including a letter last week by the Catholic Bishop of Jaffna. But there has been no response;
5. Appeals by church leaders and local and international human rights groups have also not yielded any response. The Commission of Inquiry established by your Excellency last November has also been unable to make any progress, and the Commissioner present mentioned that this particular case had not yet been taken up for inquiry;

6. The United Nations Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances have also taken up this case with the government of Sri Lanka and again, there is no progress in assisting them to arrive at a conclusion.

We also noted that enforced disappearances such as this are heinous crimes which are even worse than an assassination, as the agony and despair for family members and friends of a disappeared person will only end if and when the fate of the victim is actually known. The Chairperson of the Civil Monitoring Commission noted that the pattern of disappearances and other human rights violations indicated that these are deliberate and systematic violations with the support or complicity of the government.

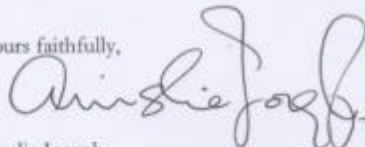
We regret that for a whole year, domestic human rights protection mechanisms, including the Commission of Inquiry established by Your Excellency have failed to find out what happened to Fr. Jim Brown and Mr. Vimalathas and prosecute those accountable. This is also the case in respect of other instances of disappearances.

Thus, we call on Your Excellency again, to ensure an independent and impartial inquiry with full international participation to find out the truth and identify those responsible for the disappearance of Fr. Jim Brown and Mr. Vimalathas.

At the same time, in order to assist the Sri Lankan government to guarantee the security of its citizens, including religious leaders, humanitarian workers and media, we call on you to draw on the assistance being offered by the international community, by:

- i. Responding favorably to requests by the UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances, UN Special Rapportuer on Freedom of Expression, UN Special Rapportuer on Independence of Judges and Lawyers and the UN Independent Expert on Minority issues;
- ii. Ratifying the UN Convention against Enforced Disappearances and make enforced disappearances a crime under domestic legislation;
- iii. Accepting a fully fledged field based UN Human Rights Monitoring Team, under the auspices of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Yours faithfully,



Ainslie Joseph
Convenor / Chief Animator
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Damaris Wickremesekera
Executive Director
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