

Another religious leader / aid worker killed in Sri Lanka

It is with deep sadness that we learnt the news of the killing of Rev. Fr. Nicholaspillai Pakiaranjith, a Catholic priest from the Diocese of Mannar. He had been working to assist and protect internally displaced peoples (IDPs) in and around Mannar, as the District Coordinator of the well known international church agency Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS).

Fr Packiaranjith, known as Fr. Ranjit, was killed in a claymore blast in the Mallavi area on Tuesday 26 September when he was carrying humanitarian supplies to a camp and orphanage at Vidathalvu for people affected by the war.

We offer our deepest condolences to the family members of Fr. Ranjith, the Bishop and the clergy of Mannar diocese and JRS staff and strongly condemn this brutal and deliberate killing. Killing of religious leaders and humanitarian workers denies protection and assistance to people affected by the violence and hostilities.

Fr. Ranjith is the 4th religious leader to be killed or subjected to enforced disappearance¹ since August 2006 in the North and East of Sri Lanka and the 58th humanitarian worker to be killed or subjected to enforced disappearance in Sri Lanka since January 2006.²

We note with dismay that, to our knowledge, no one has been prosecuted in relation to the above incidents. The killing also comes less than two weeks after the Sri Lankan government dismissed and denied submissions by Sri Lankan and international religious and civil society groups to the UN Human Rights Council on attacks on religious leaders and places of worship as “isolated incidents” and a “desperate attempt by a small number of NGOs to portray Sri Lanka as a country where religious leaders and places of workshop have been under constant attack.”³

We call on relevant authorities to take a serious look at this issue and ensure an independent investigation and prosecute those responsible.

We again reiterate our call to the Government of Sri Lanka, the LTTE and all armed actors, to respect international humanitarian law and ensure the security of religious leaders and humanitarian workers so that they are able to carry on their crucial work of assisting and protecting people affected by the conflict.

1. Association of War Affected Women, Kandy
2. Centre for Peace and Human Rights Culture, Jaffna
3. Centre for Peace Building and Reconciliation (Cpbr), Colombo
4. Centre for Peoples Dialogue, Negombo
5. Centre for Society and Religion (CSR), Colombo
6. Christian Alliance for Social Action (CASA), Colombo
7. Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, Colombo
8. Equalground, Colombo
9. Friends of the Third World, Negombo
10. Gampaha District Human Rights Citizens Committee, Ekela
11. Home for Human Rights (HHR), Colombo
12. Human Rights Media Resource Centre, Kandy
13. International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), Colombo
14. International Friends for Global Peace, Colombo
15. International Movement Against all forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR), Colombo
16. Justice Peace Human Development Human Rights Secretariat (SETIK), Caritas-Kandy
17. Law & Society Trust (LST), Colombo
18. Mannar Women for Human Rights and Democracy, Mannar
19. Meepura Publication, Negombo
20. National Peace Council (NPC), Colombo
21. Nonviolent Peaceforce Sri Lanka, Colombo
22. Oblate Justice and Peace Committee (Colombo Province), Colombo

2nd October 2007

¹ See written statement submitted to the 6th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, available at <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G07/140/16/PDF/G0714016.pdf?OpenElement> and the oral statement submitted to the UN Human Rights Council available at <http://portal.ohchr.org/portal/page/portal/HRCExtranet/6thSession/OralStatements/130907/Tab/Tab/NGO4.JointStatement-PaxRomana.pdf>

² See list compiled by the Law & Society Trust, available at <http://www.lawandsocietytrust.org/PDF/CoI%20submission%201%20-%20Combined%20Public%20Infor%20-%2023Aug07-final.pdf>

³ See statement by the Sri Lankan government at the 6th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, available at <http://portal.ohchr.org/portal/page/portal/HRCExtranet/6thSession/OralStatements/140907/Tab16/Tab2/3.SriLanka.pdf>