



Tamil Information Centre

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TIC calls on the Sri Lanka government to create a single authoritative record of casualties of Armed Violence

The Tamil Information Centre (TIC) welcomes the statement made by the Sri Lankan Minister of Defence, Gotabaya Rajapaksa on Thursday, 24 November 2011, at the Inaugural National Conference on “*Reconciliation: The Way Forward for Post Conflict Sri Lanka*”, recognising the importance of recording civilian casualties of war in Sri Lanka.

Defence Minister Rajapakse confirmed that a census is being carried out by the Department of Census and Statistics, in an effort to gather information on civilian deaths in the final battle in 2009. The government hopes that the data collection will disprove allegations of war crimes, as the census apparently already shows that very few casualties were caused by military action. According to the Defence Minister, the categories of deaths recorded in the census includes those who died of natural causes and in accidents, those who died while fighting as members of the LTTE, whether voluntarily or under coercion; those who were killed by the LTTE and those who died as a result of state military action. It is claimed that missing persons will also be accounted for by discovering those who have left the country illegally.

TIC welcomes the initiative of recording civilian casualties by the government as a necessary development and the fulfillment of a state obligation. TIC looks forward to studying the census data and methodology in comparison with other such work being carried out internationally. TIC believes that no person should die unrecorded, and a democracy is only properly functional if its people are well informed. The primary responsibility to record the details of every causality of armed violence lies with the state, and the state must investigate the circumstances of such deaths. The governmental recognition of this fact is both welcome and overdue.

However, the government should not take this census only to counter the figures of civilian deaths being quoted by various NGOs and the UN. The government should ensure that every person killed by armed violence is ***promptly recorded, correctly identified and publicly acknowledged.***

TIC is also undertaking a project of collecting information on all deaths in the history of conflict in Sri Lanka, as we believe that full information on “all lives” lost is essential for several different reasons. Firstly, officially recognised casualty data, including the name of the person killed and a description of the incident, restores dignity to the individual. It allows families, friends and communities to grieve and move on, and supports practical arrangements such as attaining death certificates. This information is also central to truth and reconciliation efforts, and peace processes must be based on full factual analysis of the conflict and its impact. TIC will be glad to examine the data produced by the government and compare it to its own database.

We urge the government to expand its census back to the time of the first political killing of a Government Clerical Services Union (GCSU) Member and the clerical officer of the Department of Health and Sanitary Services, Velupillai Kandasamy, on 5 June 1947 at Kolonnawa in the Western Sri Lanka, for participating in a demonstration protesting the interdiction of the GCSU president T.B. Illangaratne and nineteen others of his trade union colleagues for having held a meeting on the Galle Face Green in contravention of public service regulations. In this incident, the police fired on the orders of the British police superintendent Robins. Since then, thousands of lives, Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim have been lost to violence both in the long-term armed conflict in the context of Tamil national struggle, in the context of the JVP uprising in the 1970s, and in political assassinations. The state should have a full record of all lives lost in the duration of the country's violent history.

Recognition of every casualty caused by the large scale of armed violence is a state obligation and cannot be ignored. The fact that such work is being done by non-governmental entities such as TIC is an illustration of the fact that it can be done.

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