

3<sup>rd</sup> March 2021

*An Open Appeal to the Government of Sri-Lanka*

## **Immediately Withdraw the Decision Taken by the Government to Bury the Deceased of COVID-19 Pandemic in Iranaitheevu Island of Kilinochchi District**

We the people of Iranaitheevu island village call upon the government of Sri-Lanka and relevant government officials to reconsider and immediately withdraw the decision taken by the government to bury the deceased of COVID 19 Pandemic in our island Iranaitheevu

Iranaitivu is an island village which is situated in the gulf of Mannar, approximately 20 kilo meters of distance from the Mulangavil/Nachchikkuda mainland costal village of Pooneryn division of Kilinochchi district, and it is the native place of to 417 families.

Due to the war, we the people of this island given up all our means of livelihoods, livestock and habitats and entirely displaced to Mulangavil area of Kilinochchi mainland in 1997. The Sri-Lankan naval forces taken the control of the island and even the war ended in 2009 we were not allowed to go back to our village. In 2016 we started our democratic and peaceful campaigns and advocacy activities for resettlement and on 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 2018, on the 395<sup>th</sup> day of our sit on protest, by our own initiation we crossed the sea by 50 fishing boats, holding white flags and landed in our island village without any hindrance from the naval forces. At present we gradually restore our lives in the island with several hardships.

The ocean that surrounds the Iranaitheevu contains abundance of varieties of seafood including export quality sea cucumbers. It is the port of fishers of Northern part of the country when they are required to re fuel their boats, repair them, mend the nets and also to take a rest. The soil is rich, and the inland area is covered with trees and a suitable place

for cultivation and cattle breeding. Making the island village as the burial ground of the deceased of COVID 19 would totally destruct our lives.

It takes nearly 1 hour and 30 minutes to travel from the Mulangavil mainland to Iranaitheevu by boat under a normal weather condition. When the sea is rough and weather is unfavourable, sea travel is prevented. Therefore, it is not practicable to transport a virus infected dead body safely by boat and cross 20 Km sea distance.

We the people of Iranaitheevu along with our fellow North and East people continuously stand up for the burial rights of our fellow Muslim community and voice against the forced cremation. We emphasize that the dead bodies must be given due respect according to the culture of our country as well according to the universal humanitarian values. Transporting the dead bodies of COVID infected persons place to place is a violation of the dignity of those deceased as well their families.

Therefore, we emphasize the Sri-Lankan government to withdraw the unwise decision that was taken by them to making the Iranaitheevu island as the graveyard of COVID deceased. We also request the government to give due respect and ensure the burial rights of Muslims and other communities in suitable places.

People of Iranitheevu