

Priests and Religious for Justice and Peace, North-East.

May 25th, 2026.

With this statement, we emphatically reaffirm our position on Eelam Tamils' political aspirations, which are non-negotiable, and express our solidarity with Fr. Jeewantha Peiris (a Sinhala Catholic priest), who has been condemned by Sinhala-Buddhist extremists and the Catholic religious leadership in the island. Fr Pieris has spoken truth to power by stating that what happened to the Tamils is a genocide and Tamils have been subjected to historic oppression by the Sinhala majoritarian state.

As Priests and Religious from the North and East, together with other priests and religious throughout the island, we wish to state the following:

The press conference given by the spokesperson for the Archdiocese of Colombo condemns Fr. Pieris' position and denies any wrongdoing by the Sinhala state against the Tamils. According to the spokesperson, the Sinhala state waged a war against terrorism, not against the Tamil people.

Abundant evidence, both historical and contemporary, corroborates the view that the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka experiences polarisation along ethnic lines. This is not a secret, nor is it unique to Sri Lanka that the Church community can be united by shared faith, but divided by ethnic, cultural, economic or political differences. The Tamil Catholic community has taken the side of the oppressed, as mandated by Scripture and the Church's own Magisterium. We regret that the Sri Lanka Bishops' Conference has not been consistent in adopting a similar Gospel-based stance for truth and justice. At times, its pronouncements have reflected the discourse of the state more than the Gospel.

The Eelam Tamils' struggle for liberation resulted from the Sinhala state's oppressive measures against the Eelam Tamils. Refusing to acknowledge the root causes of the conflict and blaming Tamil victims and survivors for the genocidal war that culminated in Mullivaikkal reflects a denial strategy on the part of Church leadership. Tamil armed resistance was the product of a long history of oppression and marginalisation that stretches back to colonial times. We vehemently reject and condemn any attempt to deny historical facts and bury the truth. Recovery of truth is necessary for justice. There is no peace without justice.

In their press statement of May 16, 2022, the North-East Bishops' Council clearly called for May 18 to be remembered as the "Day of Tamil Genocide". The bishops' statement also emphasised that "only the Truth sets us free".

Fr. Francis Joseph who was forcibly disappeared during the last phase of the war, and about whom the Church still maintains silence, directed his final letter (May 10, 2009) to Pope Benedict XVI, stating:

I am not unaware that this letter would arouse the wrath of the Sri Lankan government which will resort to the revenge by killing me. I am also not unaware that some of the Church authorities may find some reasons for excommunicating me. But I deem it my duty in conscience to point my finger at the Church for its silence ... the silence in the face of violence of the Church, which should have been in the forefront to advocate the cause of the Truth and Justice and the Freedom of the downtrodden and derelicted people, will certainly erode its moral authority in the world.

A communication to the President of the Sri Lankan Bishops' Conference via the President of the North-East Bishops' Council, signed by 460 religious and priests across the island, requested that May 18 would be deemed "A Day of Mourning, Prayers and Repentance Islandwide". To date, this request has received no response.

With our present statement, we declare that an historical genocidal process against the Eelam Tamils reached its zenith in Mullivaikkal in 2009, and a systematic genocide continues to unfold in the Tamil homeland. Targeting advocates of truth merely mirrors the measures that the Roman Empire adopted against Jesus, who is our TRUTH, WAY and LIFE.