

23 May 2017

Sri Lanka: Father Elil Rajan summoned for the third time in one week over commemorative event for civil war victims

On 20 May 2017, **Father Elil Rajan** was summoned by the police in Mullaitivu, in the Northern Province, with regard to a commemorative event held in Mullivaikkal, where the names of Tamils who were killed at the end of the Sri Lankan civil war were carved on rocks. Although the authorities later withdrew the summons, they are investigating the event and asked Father Elil to provide a list of the names that were engraved on the rocks. Father Elil Rajan had already been summoned and questioned on 16 May by the Mullaitivu Police and on 19 May by the Vavuniya Police over the event he organised for Mullivaikkal Remembrance Day on 18 May, a remembrance day observed by Tamil people to commemorate those who died in the final stages of the civil war.

[Father Elil Rajan](#) is a human rights defender and Programme Director for the Adayaalam Centre for Policy Research, a non-profit think tank working on accountability and non-exclusionary justice and reconciliation initiatives. He is an advocate for the rights of Tamil war survivors and families of victims, and is known for his engagement and collaboration with Sinhalese activists from other parts of Sri Lanka, the international community and the Sri Lankan government. In 2016, he served as the Vavuniya district Chairperson of the Zonal Task Force of the Consultation Task Force on Reconciliation Mechanisms, an initiative of the Sri Lankan government. Father Elil Rajan organises commemorative events in the North-East regions, considered to be Tamil land, and is also the co-spokesperson of the Tamil Civil Society Forum.

On 20 May 2017, Father Elil Rajan was summoned in relation to a commemorative event he organised near St. Paul's Church in East Mullivaikkal, a village on the north-east coast of Sri Lanka which was the scene of the final battle of the civil war. The event consisted of placing rocks carved with the names of Tamil victims of this final battle. While the police summons was withdrawn, the human rights defender was asked to provide the list of names that was engraved on the rocks. Father Elil Rajan had previously been summoned and questioned on 16 May by the Mullaitivu Police and on 19 May by the Vavuniya Police over the event he organised for Mullivaikkal Remembrance Day on 18 May, a commemorative day observed by Tamil people to remember those who died in the final stages of the civil war.

The ongoing harassment of Father Elil Rajan is part of a broader crackdown on Tamil civil society, which has been subjected to other forms of harassment, intimidation and surveillance which hinder non-exclusionary truth and reconciliation efforts by restricting the recognition and remembrance of human rights violations suffered by Tamil people during the civil war. Human rights defenders such as Father Elil Rajan who work on Tamil issues and for the inclusion of the Tamil perspective in truth and reconciliation efforts, are particularly targeted through surveillance, and freedom of expression and assembly is restricted in Tamil regions, especially in military-occupied territories affected by the civil war. Police occasionally use excessive force to disperse protesters, and the army has imposed some restrictions on assembly in the North and East, particularly for planned memorial events concerning the end of the war, which impact human rights defenders working on violations perpetrated in the region both during and after the civil war. These restrictions have disproportionately affected Tamil people.

Front Line Defenders is concerned by the repeated summons of human rights defender, Father Elil Rajan, which it believes to be directly linked to his peaceful and legitimate work in defence of human rights and non-exclusionary truth and reconciliation efforts in Sri Lanka.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Sri Lanka to:

1. Immediately cease all further harassment of **Elil Rajan**, as Front Line believes that his summonses are solely as a result of his legitimate work in defence of human rights;
2. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Sri Lanka and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.