



## CATHOLIC JUSTICE AND PEACE COMMISSION OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF BRISBANE

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### Media Release

Tuesday 23 May 2017

#### **Tamil Priest Harassed and Intimidated by Sri Lankan Police: Foreign Minister Urged to Raise Case with Visiting Sri Lankan President**

The Catholic Justice & Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Brisbane has called on Foreign Affairs Minister, Julie Bishop, to raise the case of a Tamil priest who has been harassed and intimidated by police in Mullivaikkal in the north of Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka's President, Maithripala Sirisena, begins a 4 day official visit to Australia today and the Commission wants Ms Bishop to challenge him on the on-going harassment of human rights defenders which continues eight years after the long running civil war in Sri Lanka.

Jesuit priest, Fr Elil Rajendran, worked with other Tamils in Mullivaikkal, the site of the last battle of the Sri Lankan civil war, to hold a memorial ceremony on the anniversary of the end of the war on May 18.

The Commission's Executive Officer, Peter Arndt, spoke directly to Fr Rajendran this week and says Fr Rajendran is concerned that he will be charged with an offence under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

"Fr Rajendran's office has been under surveillance by police for some time and he was interrogated by police on two occasions," Mr Arndt said.

"Fr Rajendran had organised for a stone carver to prepare some memorial stones with the names of some of the Tamils killed during the last battle," he said.

"A court banned a memorial service to be held on land adjacent to St Paul's Catholic Church in Mullivaikkal on 18 May, but an appeal saw the ceremony go ahead in the church grounds instead," he said.

"Police have also been harassing the stone carver, questioning him repeatedly," he said.

"Fr Rajendran was told that the list of names carved on the stones would be sent to the Terrorism Investigation Division in Colombo to ascertain if any of them are identified as members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam," he said.

"If the authorities determine that any of the names are those of Tamil Tigers, Fr Rajendran fears he will be charged with supporting terrorists," he said.

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“Families should be able to remember and memorialise their dead whether they were Tamil Tigers or not,” he said.

“This sort of mean spirited action, along with the harassment and intimidation of those helping Tamils to get justice and healing, fosters resentment among Tamils in the north and east of Sri Lanka and prevents healing and reconciliation in the country,” he added.

Mr Arndt said that the Commission works with the Queensland Chapter of the Australian Tamil Congress (ATC), to hold a remembrance ceremony each year on 18 May.

“We joined with the Tamil community and their supporters at St Brendan’s Primary School in Moorooka on 18 May for the annual memorial ceremony,” Mr Arndt said.

“Eight survivors of the last battle of the civil war were present and lit a memorial lamp,” he said.

“One of them spoke about the horrors of that battle,” he said.

“There has been more than enough pain and suffering by Tamils in the north of Sri Lanka,” he said.

“We hope Ms Bishop and our Government will urge the Sri Lankan President while he is here in Australia to put an end to the harassment of human rights defenders like Fr Elil,” he said.

“We also think it is time Australia put much more pressure on the Sri Lankan Government to work with internationally respected judges and prosecutors to hold accountable those who are accused of war crimes and human rights violations committed during the civil war,” he said.

“Thousands of innocent people were slaughtered and many thousands of lives were torn apart by merciless and deliberate attacks on Tamil civilians living in what were supposed to be safe zones,” he said.

“They need to see justice done if there is to be healing,” he said.

For comments and more information, please contact Peter Arndt on +61 409 265 476.