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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

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The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[10 August 2025]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Excavations at Chemmani: The Discovery of Another Sri Lankan Government's Genocidal Act Against Tamils

Chemmani, a village on the outskirts of Jaffna, is a serene and beautiful town that has come to take on a notorious reputation. It is the site of mass graves, where potentially, hundreds of Tamils who were murdered by the Sri Lankan military lie buried.

These graves date back to the mid-1990s, when Sri Lankan government forces invaded and occupied the Jaffna peninsula during Operation Riviresa. Hundreds of Tamils who had forcibly disappeared, abducted or detained by the military, during this period were killed and buried in Chemmani.

The first open Sri Lankan confirmation of such a site came in 1998, when Sri Lankan Army soldier Lance Corporal Somaratne Rajapakse testified in court that “300 to 400 bodies” of missing Tamils were buried in Chemmani. His shocking revelation did not spark the investigations that were needed. Instead, investigations and excavations were subjected to Sri Lankan government bureaucracy and intentional neglect, having stalled for decades.

Background: A Brutal Crime Leads to a Chilling Revelation

The story of the Chemmani mass graves is intertwined with the infamous Krishanthi Kumaraswamy case of 1996.

Krishanthi, an 18-year-old Tamil schoolgirl, was gang-raped and murdered by Sri Lankan Army personnel at a checkpoint in Jaffna on September 7, 1996. When her mother, younger brother, and a family friend went searching for her, they were abducted and killed as well. All four bodies were later found buried at Chemmani in shallow graves. The outrage over this crime led to the arrest and trial of several soldiers. In July 1998, five Sri Lankan soldiers, including Rajapakse, were convicted of Krishanthi's rape and murder, and the murders of her family members. It was at the end of this trial that Rajapakse made an explosive revelation. Chemmani, he alleged, held many more bodies beyond those of the Krishanthi case.

During sentencing, Rajapakse spoke up from the dock and gave a startling confession. He insisted that he “didn't kill anyone”, but “only buried bodies”. He claimed he could identify sites in Chemmani where “300 to 400” people were buried, specifically Tamils who had disappeared during the army's 1995–96 campaign in Jaffna.

This admission corroborated what human rights groups and Tamils had spoken out about for years. Amnesty International had earlier reported “reliable evidence” that up to 600 people disappeared in Jaffna in 1996, with bodies possibly dumped in “lavatory pits, disused wells and shallow graves”. Rajapakse's testimony gave a concrete location to these allegations – Chemmani.

The 1999 Investigation and Exhumations at Chemmani

Confronted with Rajapakse's allegations, the Sri Lankan authorities initiated an investigation in 1998–99. The Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission requested UN assistance, and the Colombo High Court authorized efforts to locate the graves. In June 1999, Corporal Rajapakse was flown to Jaffna to help identify the burial sites he had described. He led investigators to several spots in Chemmani.

On June 16–17, 1999, digging at one of the identified sites uncovered human remains. After a few hours of digging through hard, dry soil, the team noticed tell-tale signs of decayed matter beneath. Soon, the first body was found just two feet below the surface: part of a knee with shreds of trouser fabric attached. Work had to pause at nightfall, with the pit covered by a simple sheet of black plastic.

Families of the disappeared hoped this would finally reveal their loved ones' fates. However, the investigation stalled after the initial exhumations. By December 1999, Sri Lankan authorities astonishingly announced that experts had reached “a unanimous decision that there are no such graves as originally alleged” beyond those already found. The government

prematurely closed the investigation, disputing Rajapakse's assertion of hundreds of bodies. This was despite the fact that Rajapakse and his co-prisoners had named around 10 different grave sites and additional witnesses had pointed to others.

Sri Lanka's war effort against the Tamils escalated in the years after 1999, and focus shifted away from earlier incidents like Chemmani.

Rajapakse's testimony, after briefly raising hopes, ended up highlighting the climate of impunity. The authorities chose to ignore or cover up evidence rather than fully pursue it.

For Tamil families, Chemmani became emblematic of their decades-long struggle for truth. Mothers and relatives of the disappeared in the North-East continued to protest and demand answers, often holding vigil with photos of missing loved ones. They repeatedly called for the Chemmani graves and other suspected mass graves to be properly investigated with international oversight, since Sri Lankan authorities refused to do so.

Recent discovery: New Mass Grave Unearthed in Chemmani

After years of dormancy, Chemmani returned to the spotlight in 2025 due to a new discovery. In February 2025, workers preparing to build a crematorium at the Ariyalai Sindhubbath burial ground (a public cemetery in Chemmani) stumbled upon human remains. They alerted local authorities, and the Jaffna Magistrate promptly ordered a fresh investigation and supervised excavation of the site. This Sindhubbath cemetery is located not far from the spots where bodies were exhumed in 1999.

A new excavation effort began in mid-May 2025 under the direction of Dr. Raj Somadeva, a senior archaeologist appointed by the court. In Chemmani, his team worked over several weeks, with oversight by the local judiciary and police. By June 8, 2025, the site was officially declared a mass grave after significant findings. The excavation uncovered 118 human skeletal assemblages in total, including the remains of three infants (babies under 10 months old) among them. The presence of infant skeletons was particularly heart-rending – indicating that even children were not spared, or that whole families might have been victims.

Many Tamil families in the Jaffna area have spent decades searching for missing relatives, some since 1995–96, others from later phases of the armed conflict, especially 2009. Tens of thousands of people have been forcibly disappeared in Sri Lanka, one of the highest numbers recorded in the entire world according to United Nations figures. Every skeletal remain uncovered in places like Chemmani could potentially match one of those names.

In this latest excavation, families of the missing and Tamil civil society groups have also mobilized to ensure the process is transparent. They fear a repeat of previous mass grave investigations that yielded no accountability. As one activist, Yogarasa Kanagaranjani of the Association of Relatives of Enforced Disappearances, put it: "This could also be covered up like the other graves, with no justice or answers given... If you ask the killers to give you justice, will they?"

Current Status and the Outlook for Justice

As of July 2025, the Chemmani mass grave investigation is ongoing under Sri Lankan court supervision. The excavation at the Sindhubbath burial ground was temporarily paused in mid-June and is scheduled to resume on June 26, 2025. The remains unearthed, 147 skeletons so far, have been transferred to expert custody for analysis. Sri Lankan officials say that once excavation is complete, forensic examinations will determine causes of death and identities where possible. The court in Jaffna will then decide on further steps, which could include criminal investigations if specific victims or perpetrators are identified.

However, families of victims and activists remain justifiably concerned that without sustained pressure, the Chemmani case could meet the same fate as in 1999 – a few findings, then silence. They stress the need for continuous media attention and international monitoring.

Recommendations

To HRC Members to

1. Recognize the genocide resolution passed unanimously in the Northern Provincial Council of Sri Lanka on 10th February, 2015.
2. Refer Sri Lanka to the International Criminal Court.
3. Have a new Resolution under Agenda 4 of the Human Rights Council to appoint a country specific special Rapporteur.
4. Renew the mandate of OHCHR and its Sri Lanka Accountability Project.
5. Referral and the establishment of an Independent International Investigative Mechanism (IIIM).

To the OHCHR, Special Rapporteurs and Treaty Bodies Experts

6. Please help us to ensure to protect Tamil human rights defenders in Sri Lanka to carry out their legitimate work.
7. OHCHR successive reports don't mention "Tamils" who are the victims of Genocide in Sri Lanka, we therefor request you to investigate this omission and to mention the appropriate word of "TAMILS" wherever it's needful.

To United Nations Special-Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide Professor Virginia Gamba and on Responsibility to Protect Mme Mô Bleeker

8. Issue a public statement that unequivocally recognizes the genocidal nature of Sri Lanka's actions in Vanni.
9. Advocate for and support independent, international investigations into atrocity crimes committed against the Eelam Tamils.
10. To recognize the failure of United Nations to prevent Tamils from genocide and now take the Responsibility to propose appropriate measures to protect Eelam Tamils from ongoing genocide.

To the European Union and Multilateral Donors

11. To stop being complicit in the ongoing genocide against Eelam Tamils and to suspend all aid and benefits such as the GSP+ granted to Sri Lanka.
12. Provide support and assistance to Tamil activists, Tamil human rights defenders, Tamil victims and Tamil survivors.

Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappeared, Amparai District, Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappeared, Batticallo District, Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappeared, Killinochi District, Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappeared, Mannar District, Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappeared, Mullaithivu District, Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappeared, Trincomalle District, Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappeared, Vavuniya District, Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappeared, Jaffna, Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappeared, North & East Provinces, Association Internationale Contre les Disparitions forcées, Global Tamil Movement, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.