

NESOHR's M-A-M interim report

Inquiry into the 1990 Mandaitivu-Allapiddy-Mankumban (M-A-M) disappearances

NESOHR is currently undertaking an inquiry into the M-A-M disappearances that occurred in 1990 when the Sri Lankan army was camped in the M-A-M villages. This inquiry by NESOHR was initiated by the parents whose sons disappeared during this period from the M-A-M villages. NESOHR's aim is to find clear and definitive answers that the parents are seeking.

The three M-A-M villages are situated just across the Dutch Fort in Jaffna from which the Sri Lankan military was able to launch operations. Close to 6000 people were crowded into the PhilipNeri's church in Allaipiddy on 25th August 1990 as instructed by the army. Army rounded up the church and separated the men and women. Then they proceeded separate the men into different age groups. Around 500 young men were then taken away by the army from the PhilipNeri's church. Most of them were later released slowly but around 25 of the men who were taken were not released. This was repeated again on 23-09-90 in the Mankumban village where army took more men from the school and temples where people have taken refuge. When the army left the M-A-M villages, a total of around 70 young men taken like this have disappeared.

Given that there were only about 800 families living in these three villages the impact of the incident on the villagers is substantial. The above two dates, especially, are engraved deeply in the psyche of these three villagers because most of these young men were taken away on these two days.

We have been able to talk to 39 families from which 48 people have disappeared. In other words from eight families more than one family member has disappeared. From one family three members have disappeared.

Some of the parents who have met us have said that it would have been easier if their child died of illness or accident but what they are facing is unbearable. They always start crying when they say this. In many cases their physical appearance tell half the story. They live and search with their souls destroyed.

There are two striking aspects to the narratives of the affected families. Listening to their narratives is an eye opener about what occupying armies do under conditions of war. It seems the utter exhaustion of facing the terror of military creates the shocking implicit acceptance in the people who have come to speak of the worst conduct of the armies as a natural behaviour without the outrage one expects from people. It is this condition of the people, the removal of their dignity that is worse than the atrocity itself. If there is an article or a clause in the UN human rights instruments that deals with this aspect it has been totally ignored by all human rights bodies that NESOHR has come in contact with.

Several wells in Mandaitivu, one of the M-A-M villages, hold 100-200 bodies none of which has been subjected to thorough forensic examination. These wells are now in the high security zones of the military. Some of these wells hold bodies of LTTE cadres. Others hold bodies of civilians. Red Cross with assistance from University of Jaffna initiated some excavations in 1991 but these have not been completed.

In order to complete our inquiries we are seeking contact with anyone who has some knowledge of the M-A-M disappearances. We are looking for family members of the disappeared people who have not contacted us so far and also we like to hear from eye witnesses. We would also like to hear from anyone who was involved in any of the inquiries relating to this disappearance.

We have no investigative powers to inquire into the disappearances caused by the Sri Lankan military. However, we have the desire to help the parents to find the answers. We know that there will be many Sri Lankan military personnel who will want help these desperate parents to find those answers. It cannot be easy for them either to live with the trauma of having seen what has gone on. We appeal to any Sri Lankan military personnel now living overseas who would like to tell us about the truth behind the disappearances to contact us.

Our contact details are as follows:

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