

20 November 2015

PRESS RELEASE: TRINCOMALEE SECRET TORTURE SITE

The International Truth and Justice Project – Sri Lanka (ITJP) welcomes the visit by the *UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearance (WGEID)* to the secret detention site in Trincomalee Naval Base High Security Zone. We note the WGEID team’s remark that systematic torture had taken place in the underground cells in Trincomalee and that the detention site, which was in existence for some years, could not have operated “unnoticed” by other officials.

ITJP reported in detail on the Trincomalee secret torture site in July 2015¹, giving the GPS coordinates for its location (GPS: 8°33’26”13 N, 81°14’32”87 E) and the names of naval intelligence officers whom witnesses say were in charge of the site. This information as well as detailed site sketches by survivors was shared by ITJP with WGEID in a confidential written submission before their visit to Sri Lanka.

We note the new Government of Sri Lanka has so far failed to investigate the allegations regarding the site in Trincomalee². This raises serious concerns about the pervasive climate of impunity and the Government of Sri Lanka’s reluctance to investigate and reform its own security forces, despite promises to the international community to do so.

To show good faith there are a number of immediate steps the **Government of Sri Lanka** should now take with regard to the Trincomalee site:

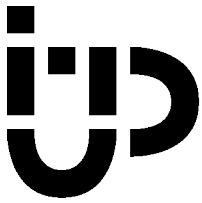
1. Broaden the investigation into the site beyond the current Colombo Fort Magistrate’s court case pertaining to alleged “white van” abductions of eleven schoolboys by naval personnel and their detention in the Trincomalee naval site. As reported by WGEID the site in Trincomalee was used over many years to detain and torture detainees beyond this case of the schoolboys. The criminal investigation should now also include the detention in the Trincomalee site of approximately 60 men and women connected to or members of the LTTE³. Some of these detainees are believed to have been apprehended at sea by the Sri Lankan navy while trying to flee the war in the Spring of 2009 and first taken to Point Pedro for questioning and then transferred to the secret detention site at Trincomalee Naval base where they were held for several years incommunicado. Others were apprehended at Pulmoddai and Vavuniya. Several were later transferred to rehabilitation camps in mid 2012.
2. Question the two marine intelligence officers allegedly in charge of the Trincomalee secret site from 2009-2012. According to witnesses these officers were Lt. Commodore Welegedara until 2010 and then a Lt. Commodore Ranasinghe⁴.
3. In addition question the overall commanders during the period 2009-2012 of the Trincomalee Naval base.

¹ A Still Unfinished War: Sri Lanka’s Survivors of Torture and Sexual Violence 2009-2015, www.itjpsl.com .

² The UN report (OISL, OHCHR, September 2015) stated in Paragraph 371 that, “In 2015, allegations were received that some detainees were still being held at a secret Navy detention centre in Trincomalee - this however could not be confirmed by the OISL but requires urgent investigation”.

³ As referenced in paragraph 152, OISL report, OHCHR, September 2015.

⁴ A Still Unfinished War: Sri Lanka’s Survivors of Torture and Sexual Violence 2009-2015, Page 80, www.itjpsl.com .



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4. Question the Naval Commanders in office during this period to ascertain if they knew of the existence of this secret detention site. They are Admiral Wasantha Karannagoda (September 2005 to July 2009), Admiral TSG Samarasinghe (July 2009 to 1 January 2011), Admiral D. W. A. S. Dissanayake (January 2011 to September 2012⁵).
5. Question naval personnel operational at Point Pedro in April and May 2009 and seize transport records for moving detainees to Trincomalee; some detainees report being transported in naval (dvora) gunboats. ITJP has the names of naval intelligence officers who were involved in moving detainees from Point Pedro to the Trincomalee site.
6. Make a formal request to ITJP to negotiate the release of the names and ranks of the 10 other naval members whom survivors state were involved in torture at this site, as well as the details of an officer and other guards present who were fully aware of the torture going on and the names of the Point Pedro personnel involved in transporting detainees to Trincomalee. Make a formal request for information from Sri Lankan civil society groups who have also been documenting accounts of survivors from the Trincomalee site.
7. Bring in a credible international forensics team to document evidence (such as blood stains) remaining in the underground torture cells and attempt to match this with survivors in Sri Lanka and abroad.
8. Seize all documentation pertaining to the interrogations, communication logs, correspondence, photographs of detainees in files that were kept, guard rotas, transport logs, and records of food and other equipment brought into the secret site. Survivors say at least 60 people were detained at this site for three years so financial and personnel accounts must have been kept.
9. The Sri Lankan Prime Minister, who has denied the existence of secret detention sites, should now publicly acknowledge their existence and outline in detail what steps he intends to take to address this problem. The issue has now been brought to his attention and he has a duty to initiate prompt and full investigations.
10. The Government of Sri Lanka should allow the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment to visit Sri Lanka and to have unimpeded access to Joseph Camp in Vavuniya where victims say they have been tortured in 2015 or last saw others who have disappeared this year. This is in addition to many documented accounts of torture occurring in Joseph Camp in previous years.

To support Sri Lanka's accountability process, **National Governments** must now in the light of the Trincomalee secret detention site:

1. Review naval cooperation, joint exercises and training with the Sri Lankan navy given the credible allegation by WGEID that naval personnel were involved in systematic torture over several years. This is in addition to multiple war witnesses who testify that the Sri Lankan navy shelled civilians in the safe zones in 2009 and the UN (OISL, 2015) report, which stated that the Sri Lankan Navy was responsible for cases of enforced disappearances in Jaffna and Mannar, among other incidents⁶.

For more information on the Trincomalee Secret Detention Site victims see pages 76-82 of *A Still Unfinished War: Sri Lanka's Survivors of Torture and Sexual Violence 2009-2015* available at www.itjpsl.com .

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⁵ Paragraph 123, OISL Report, OHCHR, September 2015.

⁶ Paragraph 412, OISL.