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For immediate release

## **USTAG and Tamil Americans Commemorate Life of Bishop Rayappu Joseph**

While Tamils all over the world mourn the passing of the former Catholic Bishop of Mannar, Sri Lanka, the [Rt. Rev. Dr. Rayappu Joseph](#), Tamils in the homeland resolve to uphold the values, strength, and steadfastness with which he espoused the cause of Tamils in the country. Never leaving his flock, he stood by his people during the worst of times – the disappearances, the killing of his Catholic diocesan priests, the bombing of fishing villages in Mannar, the Sri Lankan government shelling of the Shrine of Our Lady of Madhu killing 40 refugees on November 20, 1999 to the many massacres of civilians ultimately leading to the genocide of Tamils in Mullivaikkaal in 2009.



Bishop Joseph is most remembered for his courage in testifying to a government commission (LLRC) and later to the international human rights bodies that at least 146,679 Tamil civilians are unaccounted for based on Sri Lanka government's and its civil servants' own data of the official number of people living in the Vanni area of conflict before the escalation of

war in 2008 and the number reported to have made it to the internment camps at the end of the armed conflict. He repeatedly raised the issues of human rights abuses, including enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, rapes, forced displacement and land grabs during the island's brutal war, undeterred by threats and intimidation, raising awareness for the injustices within and outside Sri Lanka.

Bishop Joseph worked for the rights and protection of all communities in his diocese and surrounding areas. The call of the Muslim community in Mannar to join Christian and Hindu Tamils in observing Monday April 5<sup>th</sup>, the day of his funeral as a day of mourning exemplifies the deep love and affection of the multireligious, multiethnic communities have for him. USTAG and Tamil Americans join the day of mourning and extend our condolences to his family, the Catholic Church of Mannar, and the Tamils and other communities grieving for his loss.

Bishop Joseph led a life of service and dedication to the work of God and to humanity. We are grateful for his example and hope to learn from his humility, compassion, courage, and love for all. We resolve to walk on the path of justice he pioneered and honor his legacy by striving for peace and justice to all the victims and peoples of Sri Lanka.

For more information, contact:

S. Seetharam  
President  
[president@theustag.org](mailto:president@theustag.org)  
[@ustpacadvocacy](https://twitter.com/ustpacadvocacy)