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OFFICE ON MISSING PERSONS

MEDIA RELEASE

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Solidarity with Families of Missing Persons at the Heart of New Campaign

As the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) completes its first year following its establishment on 28 February 2018, it launched a communications campaign on 05 January 2019 titled "Pain never disappears, let's fulfil our responsibility to find the truth" to bring attention to the plight of the families of the missing and disappeared. The campaign aims to generate awareness and empathy towards the suffering of Sri Lankans who are still waiting to learn the truth about the fate of their loved ones. The campaign will include video and audio content highlighting the diverse impacts on the families of the missing, who share a similar pain.

"The impact of disappearances of loved ones on families is devastating. It influences them in multiple, profoundly painful ways. It leaves them in limbo of not knowing, of not even being able to grieve properly. It affects their health, livelihood, mental well-being, and their outlook on life. We, as a society, have an obligation to do all in our power to fulfil the right that these families have to know the truth," said Saliya Pieris PC, Chairperson of the OMP.

The OMP is an independent institution with a mandate to establish the truth about the fate of tens of thousands of missing persons in Sri Lanka. Contrary to misperceptions that the OMP is a judicial authority or that it is focused only on specific categories of victims, it has a broad, inclusive mandate that covers multiple conflicts and political disturbances. This includes people who disappeared during the insurrections in the South, the conflict in the North and the East and its aftermath (including those Missing in Action), and all victims of enforced disappearances.

"Our mission is to give answers to families regardless of their race, religion or which part of the country they come from. Victims are our main concern, but the rest of society has a duty to be aware of these issues and support us in our quest. The State has a legal obligation to provide families with the truth, but we as a society have a moral obligation to do all we can to relieve them of their suffering" said Major General (Rtd.) Mohanti Peiris, OMP Commissioner.

Investigating the circumstances of disappearances, recommending reparations, facilitating the issuance of Certificates of Absence or Death and maintaining a database of missing persons are among the core functions of the OMP.

“We realize the lack of understanding, sympathy and support among state officials and society in general. There is a lack of awareness of the issues faced by families of missing persons. We need to ensure greater public understanding, solidarity and support so that families do not feel that they are alone” said OMP Commissioner P. Jeyatheepa.

The opposition to acknowledging the phenomenon of disappearances in Sri Lanka, as well as the profound suffering of the families, necessitates urgent action to ensure greater public understanding and awareness of the issue.

For more information about the work of the OMP and to follow the campaign follow us on Facebook on: <https://www.facebook.com/ompsrilanka/>