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காணாமல் போன ஆட்கள் பற்றிய அலுவலகம்  
OFFICE ON MISSING PERSONS

MEDIA RELEASE

30 JANUARY 2019

**Office on Missing Persons acts as observer when handing over bone samples from the Mannar mass grave to an international laboratory for carbon dating**

On 25 January 2019, the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) observed the process of handing over the six bone samples obtained from the Mannar mass grave, located at the Sathosa Building in the Mannar town (Case No B/232/2018), for radio carbon dating, to Beta Analytics in Miami, Florida, USA. The samples were handed over by Consultant Judicial Medical Officer, District General Hospital Mannar, Dr Saminda Rajapaksha who is heading the investigation team at the site. Commissioner of the OMP, Mirak Raheem and two lawyers representing families of the missing and disappeared from Mannar, S. Niranjana and Ranitha Gnanarajah, also witnessed the handing over of the bone samples.

The OMP was established under the Office on Missing Persons (Establishment, Administration and Discharge of Functions) Act, No. 14 of 2016 (OMP Act), and has a primary mandate to search for and trace missing persons. Under its investigative powers, the OMP has the authority to apply to a Magistrate's Court to act as an observer at excavations and exhumations of suspected grave sites (Section 12(d), OMP Act). The OMP's application to act as an observer was accepted by the Honourable Mannar Magistrate on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2018 and has been observing the process of excavation since.

The OMP took the decision to observe the handing over process in order to ensure the chain of custody, as this is an important on-going case that is under investigation, and to minimise concerns that have been raised in similar instances where human remains from other mass grave sites were sent for carbon dating. The OMP sees transparency as an important issue to ensure the confidence of families of the missing and disappeared and the general public, in the investigation of the Mannar mass grave. The OMP provided the finances for carrying out the tests at Beta Analytics, in addition to covering the travel expenses of the JMO and OMP Commissioner. Since July 2018, the OMP has been supporting the costs of food, lodging and other miscellaneous costs of the excavation team and provided additional funds for tarpaulin covers to protect the grave site from the monsoon rain.

The radiocarbon test of the human remains is being carried out under an order by the Mannar Magistrate, Honourable T. Saravananaraja made on 18 January based on a collective decision by the investigation team. The sampling was conducted under the auspices of the Honourable Magistrate from 18-20 December 2018, at which the OMP was an observer. Following the testing of the samples, the results will be submitted by the laboratory in February 2019. A preliminary combined investigation report including the test results and other findings will be submitted by the investigation team to the Mannar Magistrate's Court.

Beta Analytics was selected as the laboratory as it is a recognised and accredited institution that specializes in bomb pulse carbon dating. Radiocarbon dating calculates the amount of Carbon-14 in bone and teeth samples and establishes the approximate time when an animal or plant was alive. It is a form of testing used in archaeology and forensic science for dating human remains. Where the skeletons are of persons who died after World War II, bomb pulse carbon 14 dating can provide a narrower range of time period in which the deaths occurred. The report from the laboratory, along with results from other examinations carried out by the investigation team headed by Dr Rajapaksa, will help address key questions, including if these human remains, numbering over 300 skeletons as of 22 January, are from one or multiple historical periods.