Preliminary observations of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances at the conclusion of its visit to Sri Lanka (2015)
Introduction

A delegation of the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances concluded a ten-day official visit to Sri Lanka. The visit took place from 9 to 18 November 2015.

The delegation was composed of the Vice-Chair of the Working Group, Mr. Bernard Duhaime, as well as Mr. Tae-Ung Baik and Mr. Ariel Dulitzky, members of the Working Group. During this visit, which took place in a historic moment and at a time of great hope and opportunity in the country, the Working Group has received information from the Government, victims, and civil society of enforced disappearances and studied the measures adopted by the State to prevent and eradicate enforced disappearances, including issues related to truth, justice and reparation.

At the outset, the Working Group wishes to thank the Government of Sri Lanka for extending an invitation to visit the country, and for the efforts made before and during the visit by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to facilitate its smooth undertaking. It welcomes the fact that virtually all meetings requested by the Working Group were accommodated and the openness and good disposition of officials. It also appreciates that many authorities have provided or promised to provide the documents requested by the Working Group.

The Working Group also wishes to thank the Office of the Resident Coordinator and the United Nations Country Team in Sri Lanka, as well as the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, for their support.

During its ten-day mission, the Working Group visited all parts of the island, including Batticaloa, Galle, Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mannar, Matale, Mullaitivu and Trincomalee. The Working Group met with the President, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Prison Reforms, Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Interreligious Affairs. It also met: the Army Commander; the Chief Justice; the Attorney-General; the Inspector General of Police; the Director of the Terrorism Investigation Division; the Director of the State Intelligence Service; the Vice-Director of the Criminal Investigation Department; the Governors of the Northern Province and the Eastern Province; the Chairman of the Rehabilitation of Persons, Properties and Industries Authority; as well as officials from the Office of National Unity and Reconciliation; the Government Analyst’s Department; the Presidential Commission on Missing Persons; a group of Parliamentarians including the Speaker; and the Human Rights Commission. The Working Group also visited mass graves in Matale and Mannar and the memorial for the disappeared in Seeduwa. It also visited the Boosa Detention Center, the Navy Base in Trincomalee - including a former secret detention facility within the base – and the temporary detention facilities on the 4th and 6th floor building.

The Working Group met a very high number of relatives of disappeared persons in all parts of the country and also held several meetings with representatives of all communities and sectors of civil society including NGOs, human rights defenders and lawyers. The Working Group also thank all the relatives of disappeared persons who courageously shared their testimonies with the Working Group, many for the first time.

The invitation extended by the Government to the Working Group and its increasing openness to international engagement are very positive and encouraging steps.