



Tamil Information Centre

தமிழ் தகவல் நடுவம்

Committed to Human Rights and Community Development

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PRESS STATEMENT

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Senseless Murder of a Selfless and Courageous Woman: Maheswary Velayutham

Humanitarian Maheswary Velayutham was brutally gunned down by cowards in Jaffna on 13 May 2008. The killers were probably unaware of her selfless sacrifices in the cause of her community. The Tamil Information Centre (TIC) condemns this appalling act of terrorism which has left many people in Sri Lanka and abroad in despair. This is a dark day for everyone who believes in human rights and the Tamil people's struggle for self-determination.

She escaped previous assassination attempts and was well aware of the threats to her life, but this did not dissuade her from continuing her work for the rights of the people in Sri Lanka. She showed immense personal courage. Maheswary helped thousands of people seeking refuge in India. She also assisted many asylum seekers to other parts of the world, particularly by providing documentation on developments and legal issues in Sri Lanka. She carried out this work impartially and never questioned about the political persuasion or allegiance of the victims.

Maheswary was responsible in the late 1980s for the establishment of a medical unit to care for the injured people who were brought from Sri Lanka to the Mandapam Refugee Camp in Tamil Nadu. She showed tremendous leadership and courage while working with the TIC in Madurai, Tamil Nadu. She was responsible for the TIC offices in Madurai, where reports on the human rights and humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka were received daily, recorded and disseminated throughout the world. She was often under tremendous pressure from the various Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups, but was able by her intelligent and persuasive ability to steer the TIC on the path of the purpose for which it was created. She worked tirelessly and enthusiastically, and showed in word and deed a deep commitment to the Tamil cause - the rights, freedom, and dignity of the Tamil people. Her valuable contribution in the formative years of the TIC formed the basis of the TIC's international campaign for Tamil rights and has enabled the TIC to continue its work on a solid foundation.

She rejected many opportunities to pursue her legal career abroad. On these occasions she said: "I do not want to die anywhere else. I want die in my home, in my homeland". Her wish came true in a tragic manner when death caught up with her in her own village.

Assassinations, abductions and disappearances are part of the curse of Sri Lanka. The island seems to be in the grip of facism with aggressive suppression of opposition, elimination of everyone who is different and the destruction of everything that is dissimilar. During her last visit to the UK, Maheswary revealed that she had received several death threats for working with the Sri Lankan Minister of Social Services Douglas Devananda. "Of course I am scared", she said, "But I am willing to make my sacrifices, even to die".

The sense of grief at her senseless killing will be shared not just by the people of Sri Lanka but by Sri Lankan communities across the world.

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