



International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance

Distr.: General
7 October 2025

Original: English

Committee on Enforced Disappearances Twenty-ninth session

Summary record of the 549th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Friday, 26 September 2025, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Albán-Alencastro

Contents

Consideration of reports of States Parties under article 29 (1) of the Convention (*continued*)

Initial report of Sri Lanka (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports of States Parties under article 29 (1) of the Convention
(continued)

Initial report of Sri Lanka (continued) ([CED/C/LKA/1](#); [CED/C/LKA/Q/1](#);
[CED/C/LKA/RQ/1](#))

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Sri Lanka joined the meeting.*
2. **The Chair**, welcoming the delegation of Sri Lanka to the meeting, explained that some members of the delegation would be participating via video link.
3. **Mr. de Frouville** (Country Rapporteur) said that he would welcome answers to the questions he had asked at the previous meeting concerning the number of acts of enforced disappearance that had been prosecuted, including those prosecuted as murders or other offences, and the steps taken to follow up on the recommendations issued by the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka and various investigative bodies regarding the individuals who should be prosecuted in such cases. It would be interesting to hear how the State Party was putting its zero-tolerance policy on enforced disappearance into practice and what its stance was on the project launched by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to enhance accountability for human rights violations committed in its territory.
4. He wished to know what procedures were in place to enable individuals to appeal against return or extradition orders, whether such appeals had suspensive effect and what steps were taken to ensure compliance with legal provisions on non-refoulement in practice. He would welcome an update on the State Party's examination of the case of the 116 Rohingya asylum-seekers who had arrived in its territory in December 2024, particularly in view of reports that they would be at risk of enforced disappearance if they were returned to Myanmar. It would be helpful to know whether disciplinary or criminal sanctions were handed down to individuals who committed violations of the rules governing detention and, if so, whether the delegation could provide specific examples of cases in which such measures had been imposed. He would appreciate information on the number of applications for habeas corpus proceedings that had been filed in recent years and the number that had resulted in the organization of hearings.
5. He would like to know what was done to locate children who had been subjected to enforced disappearance or had been wrongfully removed from their parents or guardians or illegally adopted and what steps would be taken to fully integrate the provisions of article 25 of the Convention into the Enforced Disappearance Act. The Committee had been informed of various cases of enforced disappearance or forced recruitment of children during the conflict in the State Party. The discovery of children's remains in mass graves appeared to corroborate allegations that hundreds of boys from the Tamil community had been disappeared by members of the State security forces after being placed in rehabilitation centres. In other cases, members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam were said to have forcibly recruited thousands of children, some of whom had subsequently been killed after being handed over to or captured by the national army. He would appreciate the delegation's comments on those allegations and information on whether steps had been taken to initiate investigations and prosecute the members of State forces and members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam who were responsible for such acts. In view of reports that a number of children who had been victims of enforced disappearance during the armed conflict had later had their identity falsified and had been subjected to illegal international adoption, he would like to know what measures the State Party had taken to address the issue of illegal adoption and whether it worked with the authorities of the destination countries to do so.
6. **Ms. Villa Quintana** (Country Rapporteur) said that she would be grateful for clarification as to whether the law provided that the statutory limitation period for acts of enforced disappearance commenced from the moment when the enforced disappearance ceased. In view of reports that individuals detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act were often unable to communicate with their lawyer or relatives and were held for months without being brought before a judge or informed of the charges against them, she wished to know what was being done to ensure compliance in practice with article 18 of the Convention

and section 16 of the Enforced Disappearance Act, which set out the rights of relatives and counsel of individuals deprived of their liberty. It would be helpful to learn how many cases involving violations of section 16 of the Enforced Disappearance Act had been brought before the courts, what reparations had been awarded to the individuals concerned and whether complaints filed after the three-month deadline established in the Act were disregarded. She wondered, too, whether any of those cases had been referred to the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, the High Court or the Supreme Court and whether penalties had been imposed on any court that failed to respond to requests for information on a detainee within the 48-hour time frame specified in the Right to Information Act.

7. She wished to know what criteria were applied by the National Authority for the Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses to determine whether an individual was eligible for protection, what measures were taken to protect victims and witnesses in cases of enforced disappearance, whether that protection extended to the victims' family members and lawyers and all other individuals involved in the investigation, whether the measures to be adopted were determined in consultation with the person seeking protection and whether mechanisms had been established to assess the level of risk faced by victims of enforced disappearance. She was curious to know what financial resources were allocated to the National Authority and what safeguards were in place to guarantee the independence of its members, in particular those who worked for the police, and ensure that no members who were suspected of involvement in acts of enforced disappearance participated in protection efforts. She would be grateful for information on what forms of protection were provided by the Victim and Family Support Unit of the Office on Missing Persons, whether it offered protection both during and after the investigation, what mechanisms were in place to facilitate its cooperation with the National Authority for the Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses and the Office for Reparations, what financial resources were allocated to it and how many people it was currently protecting. An explanation of the exact roles of the National Authority for the Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses, the Victim and Family Support Unit and the Office for Reparations would be appreciated. She would be interested, too, to hear about the measures put in place to protect victims of ill-treatment, the number of victims who had benefited from such measures and the penalties handed down to the perpetrators.

8. It would be useful to know whether content on human rights and international humanitarian law formed part of the training delivered to police officers and members of the armed forces and, if so, whether that training had helped build public trust in the defence and security forces, transform the conduct of officers during operations and address the concerns expressed by the Committee against Torture in paragraph 9 of the concluding observations it had adopted in 2016 (CAT/C/LKA/CO/5). She wondered whether ongoing training on the Convention and the Enforced Disappearance Act was provided to all personnel, including government officials, medical workers and judicial staff, who were involved in investigating acts of enforced disappearance or dealing with individuals who had been deprived of their liberty. What guidance was given to officers from the armed forces, intelligence services and police to ensure compliance with the prohibition on enforced disappearance, extrajudicial executions, torture, sexual violence and other human rights violations? It would also be interesting to learn whether the guidelines issued by the police on protecting human rights defenders and preventing deaths in custody had been incorporated into the human rights training programmes for officers.

9. She would like to know whether the Office on Missing Persons had referred any cases of enforced disappearance to the police or the Attorney General's Department for the initiation of criminal proceedings and whether it informed victims, their relatives and witnesses of their right to report serious offences to the competent authorities. She would be grateful for information on what measures had been introduced to guarantee the Office's independence and impartiality, how its staff were selected and when and how it initiated searches for disappeared persons. She wondered why the Office's findings in the 19 cases of enforced disappearance that it had investigated had not been made public and what was meant by the State Party's indication in paragraph 54 of its report (CED/C/LKA/1) that 6,598 cases had been "clarified". With regard to cases that had not yet been clarified, she wondered when the Office expected to be able to provide victims' family members with precise information on their loved ones' fate and whereabouts.

10. It would be helpful to know whether requests to search for missing persons submitted to the Office were digitized and differentiated between missing persons and persons subjected to enforced disappearance. She was curious to know whether the Office followed the Committee's Guiding Principles for the Search for Disappeared Persons, whether it had developed an action plan to ensure the efficiency of its work and whether it was working with victims of disappearance and their family members to draw up a strategy on search procedures. She would be interested to receive more information about the Office's visits to places of detention and whether it had interviewed members of the security forces and requested records from them as part of its search efforts. An explanation of whether the Office on Missing Persons and the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation had sufficient staff to carry out their duties would be welcome.

11. With regard to mass graves, she wondered whether the Office on Missing Persons had submitted any requests for exhumations to the courts, whether the State Party had a team of trained forensic specialists capable of carrying out complex, large-scale exhumations, and whether it had adequate storage facilities for the preservation of unidentified remains or bodies. She would like to know whether a centralized registry of findings had been established so that remains could subsequently be identified and handed over to family members.

12. She would be interested to know what had been done to preserve the evidence found at the mass gravesite in Chemmani. In particular, she wished to learn where the 240 bodies recovered from the site were currently located and what authority was responsible for them. She wondered whether protocols for the exhumation, recovery and identification of human remains recovered from the graves in Kokkuthoduvai had been established and, if so, whether they provided for the preservation of chains of custody for all evidence; the participation of multidisciplinary teams of archaeologists, forensic scientists, forensic doctors and anthropologists; the dignified handover of bodies to families; and the provision of psychosocial, legal and financial support to families. Were all findings systematically documented and were final reports made available to the public, with victims' privacy being respected?

13. She wished to know whether the State Party maintained a centralized registry of comprehensive ante-mortem and post-mortem data on victims and whether a genetic database had been created. It would be useful to know whether technical teams took into account international standards and existing good practices for exhumations, such as those set out in the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death.

14. She would be grateful to learn whether the State Party had considered requesting specialized international support to assist it in exhuming and identifying remains and safeguarding evidence. She wondered whether victims had been given access to information on the measures taken to search for remains and the outcome of searches. Given that serious shortcomings in the investigation of mass graves had been identified, it would be useful to know whether the State Party would take legislative measures to establish a multidisciplinary mechanism for identifying exhumed remains.

15. **Ms. Lochbihler** said that it was still not clear whether the former soldier Somaratne Rajapakse would participate in the investigations into the mass graves in Chemmani or why the journalist Kanapathipillai Kumanan had been questioned by the authorities about his legitimate work documenting mass graves. It would be interesting to know whether the State Party had the political will to investigate mass disappearances that had occurred in the more distant past, such as the disappearance of 185 persons from the village of Sathurukondan in 1990.

The meeting was suspended at 3.50 p.m. and resumed at 4.05 p.m.

16. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that the Government did indeed have the political will to investigate historical mass disappearances.

17. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that, in accordance with the Office on Missing Persons Act, the Office had developed strategies for protecting victims and supporting families. Psychosocial support was considered a priority in that connection; victims could be referred to mental health units attached to hospitals. The Office had signed a memorandum

of understanding with the Registrar General with a view to supporting the families of victims. It had met with the families, assessed their needs and helped them to obtain legal documents such as certificates of absence. Over 2,700 families had received such certificates. The Registrar General had helped families to obtain additional documents such as copies of birth certificates, which enabled dependents to obtain financial benefits from other institutions. Psychosocial support had been provided to over 370 families. In addition, the Office for Reparations had provided assistance to over 4,700 families.

18. Representatives of the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation, the Office on Missing Persons and the Office for Reparations met at least once a month to discuss and coordinate measures to support and protect victims. The Protection Unit of the Office on Missing Persons, in coordination with the police and other State agencies, continuously monitored all complaints relating to missing persons. The Protection Unit received technical support from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other international organizations. The Unit analysed cases to identify trends and to determine whether the facts of the cases fit the definition of enforced disappearance.

19. Cases that did not fall within the mandate of the Office on Missing Persons were referred to the judicial system. The joint statement on so-called “short-term enforced disappearances” issued by the Committee and the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (CED/C/11) had proved to be a valuable tool in helping the Office to determine whether cases should be classified as enforced disappearance. The Office had not yet established criteria to determine when a case could be considered closed, but it was working with victims’ families with a view to developing such criteria. If considered necessary, the definition of enforced disappearance set out in national law could be amended.

20. The Office on Missing Persons met with families and, on the basis of their testimonies, decided whether they should be referred to the Office for Reparations so that they could apply for the Family Revival Payment, which was a form of economic support rather than compensation or reparation. The Ministry of Justice and National Integration had drafted terms of reference that would be used to develop a formula for determining the level of compensation to which a family was entitled.

21. Mass graves were investigated in collaboration with the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation and ICRC, among other stakeholders. Training had been provided to archaeologists, judicial medical officers, the police and other persons involved in investigating mass graves. Members of the Office on Missing Persons had visited a number of sites where mass graves were believed to be located, including Mandaitivu and Kayts. The Office supported the right of families and civil society organizations to participate in investigations into mass graves.

22. Families had been notified about artifacts found in the mass graves in Kokkuthoduvai and had been invited to submit any relevant information. The artifacts found in the mass graves in Chemmani had been put on display for families to see. All relevant information concerning the findings would be submitted to the courts. None of the investigations into the 17 mass graves had been delayed by a lack of funding. Any persons who had wished to visit certain mass graves had been permitted to do so, within the established time limit, on condition that they did not disturb the experts working there. The forensic reports on the investigations into the graves in Chemmani and Kokkuthoduvai had been drawn up and sent for further analysis.

23. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that consultant judicial medical officers, who were attached to district hospitals, specialized in forensic pathology and forensic medicine and also received training in forensic anthropology. Three judicial medical officers had undergone specialized training in anthropology in Italy and the United States of America and were currently heading the investigations into the mass graves. Other judicial medical officers were working under their supervision and guidance. If necessary, national experts could obtain technical assistance from the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation and ICRC.

24. Officers involved in investigations had been trained to collect ante-mortem data from relatives of disappeared persons. Ante-mortem data relating to the remains of persons buried in the mass grave in Kurukkalmadam, which was the only mass grave that had been

discovered not by accident but on the basis of complaints from victims' relatives, were being collected. DNA was extracted from remains and cross-checked against a database of relatives' DNA to identify disappeared persons. Standard operating procedures for investigating mass graves had been developed in collaboration with the College of Forensic Pathologists of Sri Lanka and other partners. A training programme for officials investigating mass graves had been implemented in coordination with the Department of Archaeology, as archaeological techniques were used in excavations.

25. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that, as the Minister for Foreign Affairs had pointed out during the ongoing sixtieth session of the Human Rights Council, the Government of Sri Lanka did not recognize the Sri Lanka accountability project being carried out by OHCHR pursuant to Council resolution 46/1.

26. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that the former soldier Somaratne Rajapaksa had been arrested for the murder of Krishanti Kumaraswamy in 1995. When asked, immediately prior to his sentencing, whether he had any further information to share, Rajapaksa had referred to the existence of a mass grave in Chemmani. On the basis of that statement, the Criminal Investigation Department and justice officials had visited Chemmani and had discovered 15 bodies. Of those, four had been identified, and five army personnel had been arrested in connection with those individuals' disappearance. In conducting the investigations, the Criminal Investigation Department had relied on post-mortem data such as DNA, as other forms of evidence had not been available.

27. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that representatives of the Office on Missing Persons had visited Somaratne Rajapaksa in prison and obtained relevant information from him.

28. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that over 350 specialized police officers, called scene of crime officers, were deployed around the country and received regular training on new methods and good practices. As mentioned at the preceding meeting, they had received training from ICRC on forensic photography in connection with exhumations. Scene of crime officers participated in the investigation of mass graves and conducted refresher training courses for other officers. As a result of the training, the quality of evidence-gathering had improved significantly.

29. The basic training curriculum for police officers placed significant emphasis on human rights, including the rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community. In-service training programmes for police divisions were implemented on a monthly basis. Officers were given both theoretical and practical training.

30. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that the country's Permanent Standing Committee on Human Rights, established in 2000, had provided many training programmes to military personnel in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and ICRC. The Directorate of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights of the Sri Lanka Army had been established in 1997 and had been the first such directorate in the South Asia region. Unless cleared by the Directorate and the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, military personnel could not be recommended for inclusion in United Nations peacekeeping missions. Over 400 cells responsible for monitoring and preventing human rights violations operated under the Directorate. Examination papers for military personnel seeking promotion included two mandatory questions on human rights and humanitarian law. The General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, the Institute of National Security Studies and the Institute of Peace Support Operations Training Sri Lanka, among other agencies, trained military personnel in international law.

31. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that Sri Lanka was not a party to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or the Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. However, as a State Party to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the Convention against Torture, it was obligated to respect the principle of non-refoulement. Therefore, the Government did not expel foreign nationals to places where they might face a risk of persecution or serious human rights violations. According to figures published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there had been around 225 refugees and 165 asylum-seekers in Sri Lanka as of August 2025.

32. In December 2024, a boat carrying 120 persons from Myanmar had been rescued off the east coast of Sri Lanka by the Sri Lankan navy. The rescued persons were currently staying at an interim care facility and were provided with food, accommodation, clean water, electricity and all other basic necessities. In coordination with the Ministry of Health, healthcare services were provided to the group. Since their arrival in Sri Lanka, two of the women had given birth, prior to which they had received antenatal care. All the members of the group were healthy and were regularly screened for communicable and non-communicable diseases. A substantial amount of money was being spent on their welfare.

33. With regard to the group's illegal entry into Sri Lanka, the Government had received information that they had paid smugglers to bring them into the country. That situation was being investigated and charges had been brought against the smugglers.

34. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that section 18 of the Enforced Disappearance Act specifically provided that no person could be expelled, returned, surrendered or extradited to another State where there were substantial grounds for believing that he or she would be in danger of being subjected to enforced disappearance in that State.

35. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that, under section 360D of the Penal Code, offences related to adoption included arranging for a child to travel to a foreign country without parental consent or impersonating a mother to facilitate adoption. Once an adoption order had been issued, it could be annulled under the Children and Young Persons Ordinance if the adoptive parents were deemed unfit to care for the child. The National Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force served as the coordinating mechanism for efforts to combat child trafficking. It brought together agencies such as the National Child Protection Authority, the Department of Probation and Childcare Services and the Bureau for the Prevention of Abuse of Children and Women. To date, no cases of enforced disappearance had been recorded in connection with trafficking in persons or migration. All reported incidents of wrongful removal or disappearance of children, including unaccompanied minors, thus fell outside the scope of enforced disappearance as defined in the Convention. The National Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force continued to coordinate preventive efforts, ensure the timely identification and protection of vulnerable children and provide comprehensive support and rehabilitation services for victims.

36. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that the Adoption of Children Ordinance had been amended four times between 1941 and 1992, progressively strengthening the legal framework governing adoption. Sri Lanka had ratified the Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption in 1995, to enhance transparency and strengthen the framework for intercountry adoption. In the 1980s the competent authorities for intercountry adoption in Switzerland had requested the Government of Sri Lanka to cooperate in facilitating the search for the origins of adoptees from Sri Lanka in Switzerland. In view of that request and similar requests from individuals in the Kingdom of the Netherlands and other European countries, the Department of Probation and Childcare Services had established a dedicated unit to support and facilitate the tracing of intercountry adoptees' biological parents. Through the central authority in Sri Lanka, the biological families of some such adoptees had been successfully traced.

37. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that under the Enforced Disappearance Act, a case of enforced disappearance was considered to be continuing for as long as the deprivation of liberty was not acknowledged. The applicable provisions had not yet been tested in legal proceedings, and until a case was brought before the courts, the manner in which the law would be applied in practice remained unsettled. Previous findings by the Supreme Court interpreting fundamental rights violations as continuing violations had allowed the courts to hear cases even when the normal time bar would otherwise have applied. If that interpretation was upheld in the context of an enforced disappearance case, the usual time bar would not be applicable.

38. The National Police Commission, as the police disciplinary authority, applied strict rules on promotions and discipline; transgressions of the law were duly taken into account in that regard. However, disciplinary action did not shield the individual from criminal liability for violations of law. If, in the course of disciplinary proceedings, an individual was found to

have committed torture or related abuse, criminal proceedings could be triggered. Such individuals were not represented by the Attorney General before the Supreme Court. In addition, the Supreme Court's findings in matters involving fundamental rights violations could lead to criminal charges and did not absolve the individuals concerned of criminal liability.

39. The Office on Missing Persons was required by statute to take account of the findings and recommendations of previous commissions of inquiry. It also had statutory authority to refer matters to investigative or prosecuting authorities for further action within the criminal justice system.

40. **Mr. de Frouville** said that he would welcome clarification of the Government's position on the Sri Lanka accountability project. He would also appreciate clarification of the legal status and current circumstances of the persons who had arrived in the State Party from Myanmar seeking refugee status, given the delegation's comment that they were considered to have violated Sri Lankan law. In that regard, he wondered whether there had been any prosecutions against asylum-seekers.

41. He wished to know whether investigations, including checks against admissions registers, had been carried out into the fate of children who had disappeared from rehabilitation centres. Lastly, he would be grateful for further information on searches carried out for the biological families of victims of illegal intercountry adoption of Sri Lankan origin and their results, and wished to know whether the Government offered assistance to such persons, including psychological support and translation services.

42. **Ms. Villa Quintana** said that it would be useful to know where evidence in cases of enforced disappearance was stored and where the remains of victims of enforced disappearance were located while investigations were under way. In the light of concerns regarding the lack of independence of the members of the Office on Missing Persons, she wondered whether the State Party envisaged the creation of a transparent, public mechanism for their selection, with the participation of civil society organizations and victims, including the possibility of challenging proposed candidates. She wished to know what coordination mechanisms existed between the Office on Missing Persons and the Office for Reparations and whether there were legislative initiatives to strengthen both institutions' independence and budgetary capacity so that they could effectively support victims and to ensure that they were inclusive, gender-sensitive and responsive to the specific needs of women-headed households.

43. With regard to the Office for Reparations, she wished to know how it provided victims with meaningful and sustainable assistance, whether livelihood development programmes targeted groups other than women-headed households and how many beneficiaries of financial support, including under the Family Revival Payment programme, and collective reparations were victims of enforced disappearance. In that regard, she would also welcome information on forms of reparation other than financial compensation, in particular psychological support. She wondered what the eligibility criteria for reparations were under the Office for Reparations Act, particularly in cases of enforced disappearance. She also wished to know what measures the Office had taken to inform victims of its mandate and the scope of reparations, whether gender-sensitive guidelines existed, whether officials had received training in that regard and whether a comprehensive reparations plan had been established. She also wished to know what measures had been taken to address the demands of Tamil women who had refused compensation pending the publication of lists of those who had surrendered to and been detained by the armed forces, lists of detainees under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and reports of commissions on enforced disappearance. In the light of reports that funds allocated for reparations had been returned to the treasury, she wished to know what was being done to ensure that all allocated funds were used.

44. She wished to know what activities had been undertaken to ensure that State recognition of the occurrence of enforced disappearance was transmitted to society as a whole. She wondered what the procedure and requirements for receiving death certificates were, what sanctions were foreseen against those who, on the basis of false information, pressured families into accepting death certificates rather than certificates of absence and what procedure was envisaged to convert such death certificates into certificates of absence.

She also wondered how the State Party ensured that persons for whom death certificates had been issued were not excluded from the register of disappeared persons. It would be useful to receive information on the procedure for the renewal of certificates of absence, measures taken to ensure that they did not undermine the obligation to continue investigations into cases of enforced disappearance and campaigns conducted to inform victims of the validity, objectives and scope of the certificates.

45. Turning to the draft bill on the truth and reconciliation commission, she said that she wondered what measures had been taken regarding victims' objections in that regard and whether there were plans to advance the process, including through acts of recognition of the responsibility of the State, the army and the security forces, in order to initiate a genuine process of truth and reconciliation. She wished to receive the State Party's comments regarding complaints received by the Committee concerning reprisals and harassment against participants in protests organized by victims' associations in the north and east of the country. She also wished to know what measures had been taken to punish those who threatened human rights defenders, civil society organizations and victims who engaged with human rights bodies and what steps had been taken to prevent such acts.

46. Lastly, she wished to receive detailed information on psychosocial support programmes and measures in place to protect women and uphold their right to participate in investigations and judicial processes. She also wished to know what measures had been taken to implement the recommendations contained in the most recent concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW/C/LKA/CO/9), particularly those relating to a comprehensive truth and reconciliation process in which the experiences and needs of women survivors were centred. She wondered whether the State Party planned to adopt a public policy to prevent violence against women, adolescents and girls, to develop programmes to empower them and to support them in the search for their relatives.

47. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that since the current Government had taken office in 2024, memorials commemorating loved ones lost during the conflict had been allowed, provided that they did not glorify prohibited terrorist organizations. That policy would be maintained and its scope expanded. In a country emerging from a severe economic crisis, the Government required time to establish the necessary structures and mobilize resources for memorialization. An event to mark the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances had recently been hosted at the Prime Minister's Office, at which civil rights activists and victims' families had been invited to speak. The Government pursued an open-door policy with civil society organizations, even if it could not always respond immediately to their demands.

48. Criticism of the Office on Missing Persons and the Office for Reparations was not attributable to their inherent shortcomings or to the conduct of individuals but to the political context prior to 2020, including political interference and a lack of support. For decades, divisive politics based on race and religion had prevailed, and the necessary political will had been absent. That situation had now changed. Staffing and resources remained insufficient, but the Government's commitment was evident. Recent recruitment exercises had been undertaken and 375 million rupees had been allocated to establish 75 panels to investigate complaints concerning missing persons.

49. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that the Office on Missing Persons Act provided that candidates for appointment to the Office were to be recommended by the Constitutional Council and approved by the President. In making its recommendations, the Council was required to reflect the pluralistic nature of Sri Lankan society and to ensure that members possessed expertise in fact-finding, human rights law, humanitarian law or related fields. The Act provided that the Office's budget was to be drawn from the Consolidated Fund, which was under parliamentary control. Its financial, functional and operational independence was therefore guaranteed.

50. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that applications from family members for the issuance of a certificate of absence were referred to the Registrar General, who issued the certificates in accordance with section 8J (2) of the Registration of Deaths (Temporary Provisions) Act, as amended by Act No. 16 of 2016. Inquiry panels on cases of disappearance

were bound by a code of conduct developed by the Office on Missing Persons, which prohibited coercion, threats or inducements to obtain such certificates. Panel members received relevant training and were selected to ensure gender and ethnic balance as well as professional expertise. Complaints from families, civil society or other actors concerning violations of the code of conduct by panel members were referred to the Office on Missing Persons. Applications for certificates of absence had to be voluntary.

51. Families had often been reluctant to apply for death certificates, even when aware of the facts surrounding the disappearance of their loved ones. Temporary provisions had therefore been introduced in law to allow families to revoke a certificate of absence and later apply for a death certificate. The Office on Missing Persons did not issue or recommend death certificates; they could be issued only by the Registrar General.

52. Previously, certificates of absence had not been recognized by financial institutions or departments, including those responsible for pensions. During the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Office on Missing Persons, with the support of the Governor of the Central Bank and relevant institutions, had secured recognition of the certificate as a valid legal instrument for access to benefits and assets. Nonetheless, some institutions continued to apply their own policies, requiring cases to be dealt with individually. Renewal of the certificates, which were valid for two years, was done through the Registrar General's Office or divisional secretariats, with support provided by the Office on Missing Persons.

53. Under the Family Revival Payment scheme, monthly allowances had initially been deposited into families' bank accounts. Since the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis, families had been offered the option of receiving a fixed sum of 200,000 rupees, which could be placed in a financial institution or withdrawn for immediate needs. The intention was to provide support without creating dependency. Some families had also previously received assistance through other institutions, which was why work was under way to harmonize the system. Receipt of financial support did not preclude the continuation of the processing of complaints. The Office for Reparations was developing a formula for financial assistance that included a 12-point system for taking psychosocial and mental health needs into account.

54. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that investigations of mass graves were conducted under chapter XXX of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which governed the inquest process. Amendments were being prepared to establish more detailed provisions on such investigations. When reports of the discovery of human remains were made, the police informed the judiciary, which ordered a judicial medical officer to conduct an investigation. Judicial medical officers, trained in forensic medicine both in Sri Lanka and abroad, were employed by the Ministry of Health and provided an independent, unbiased service. Remains were held in custody in centres established in Jaffna, for cases from the north and east, and Colombo, for other cases. The chain of custody was strictly maintained in line with international standards, including when samples were sent abroad for carbon dating.

55. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that the bill on a truth and reconciliation commission had been prepared and submitted to the Law Commission, although progress had stalled. The bill contained provisions that could overlap with the mandates of the Office on Missing Persons and the Office for Reparations, and care was required to avoid conflict. The Office for National Unity and Reconciliation, with support from the United Nations Resident Coordinator Office, had prepared a road map for national reconciliation and unity. It had been shared with partners, and Cabinet approval was pending for an agreement with the Resident Coordinator Office to implement it.

56. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that the mandate of the Office for Reparations was broad. Eight policy areas for reparations had been identified: livelihood support, financial support, psychosocial support, administrative support, land restitution, infrastructure development, provision of housing, and reconciliation and non-recurrence of violence. Those areas had been developed through consultations conducted across the island, ensuring public participation. Currently, the Office for Reparations was prioritizing three areas, namely compensation and financial support, livelihood support and psychosocial support.

57. More than 4,000 families had already received revival payments. Livelihood support was regarded as a form of collective reparation, while financial and monetary assistance were considered individual reparations. Families of missing persons had also benefited from livelihood programmes aimed at empowering victims of conflict, enhancing skills, promoting sustainable livelihoods and fostering long-term resilience, with priority given to women-headed households. Training had been provided in handloom weaving, candle making, embroidery, palmyra handicrafts, financial literacy and solar panel maintenance. More than 500 victims, including over 300 women, had taken part in those programmes.

58. Community support initiatives had been strengthened through projects designed to improve access to education, sanitation and safe environments, with support from the International Organization for Migration (IOM). More than 1,000 victims, including 785 women, had benefited from such initiatives, and over 10 projects had been implemented. The Office for Reparations had established a psychosocial and psychological support programme, with technical assistance from IOM. Reparations were thus not limited to monetary compensation but were conceived as transformative measures fostering resilience and dignity for families of disappeared persons and other conflict-affected communities.

59. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that, drawing on the experience of the implementation of the National Action Plan on Gender-based Violence, the authorities had elaborated a policy on women's empowerment and gender equality, which had in turn formed the basis for the Women Empowerment Act, No. 37 of 2024. The Act provided for the establishment of a National Commission on Women, before which any woman subjected to violence could seek relief.

60. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that the Committee had sent requests for urgent action on a number of cases to the State, which had promptly addressed them. The Committee had acknowledged the State Party's commitment to engaging with and responding to it. Civil society participation was provided for under the Enforced Disappearance Act, section 14 (2) of which provided that victims and their relatives had the right to form and participate in organizations concerned with establishing the circumstances of the offences referred to under section 3 of the Act. Under section 14 (3), law enforcement authorities were required to undertake investigations whenever there were reasonable grounds for believing that an offence under section 3 had occurred, even in the absence of a formal complaint. That provision reflected the State's commitment to its statutory framework and its zero-tolerance policy towards enforced disappearance.

61. **A representative of Sri Lanka** said that the delegation had participated in the dialogue in a spirit of openness and constructive engagement. It greatly valued the opportunity to share with the Committee the important work undertaken by the Government in addressing the sensitive yet critical issue of enforced disappearance, which was crucial in national efforts towards healing and lasting reconciliation. The Government of Sri Lanka sincerely believed in delivering justice to the families of victims and in finding truth and closure.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.