

# 15 YEARS LATER

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IS RECONCILIATION POSSIBLE IN SRI LANKA?



**Sri Lanka continues to face significant challenges 15 years since the end of the civil war in the country. Successive governments have struggled to address issues such as memorialization, land conflicts, militarisation, and economic disparity. These and other problems are setbacks for healing and coexistence. Without a real commitment to solving these issues, trust in the government remains low, and reconciliation seems far off.**

Sri Lanka faces a significant challenge with one of the highest rates of enforced disappearances globally, dating back to the 1980s. Thousands of individuals have disappeared, leaving families without closure. Despite international attention and calls for justice, the problem persists, hindering reconciliation efforts and causing ongoing trauma within affected communities. The lack of accountability for these disappearances highlights systemic flaws in governance and the failure to address past injustices, contributing to social divisions and distrust in state institutions.

**He made a wooden tractor for himself. He was nine years old at the time. He used my saw, cut a (Mudhirai) tree and made it. He is smart. It used to be very nice, now it has been eaten by termites. We only had to tell something to him once. He does not like it if we say it over and over again. To others, this is only a piece of wood. But for me, it is his memory.**

Father – Segar (age 66)

23-year-old Ananda Segar went missing from the Mathalan area in 2009.



**There is a Nelli tree that he had planted. He only planted one stick and now it has grown into a tree and is bearing fruits. One day, while returning from school, he brought a stick with him. I asked him what it was. He asked me if a Nelli tree would grow if he planted a stick. I said I do not know. I told him usually they plant a small tree. He planted and watered it. We were later displaced and were in a camp. When we returned, the stick he had planted had grown into a tree. This Nelli tree is the only thing we have to remember him now.**

Mother – Kalimuthu Alagamma (age 63)

Kalimuthu Nagendran (age 17) went missing on 17th of February 2009 in Pachchaipulmottai area.

### **Murder of Joseph Pararajasingham, 2005**

The case of the assassination of MP Joseph Pararajasingham has faced long delays in investigation and prosecution. The accused were finally acquitted in 2021 when then Attorney General decided to discontinue the prosecution, when the Court of Appeal ruled the confessions against the accused inadmissible as evidence.

### **'The Trinco Five': Murder of Five Tamil Students in Trincomalee, 2006**

After a prolonged investigation and prosecution in this case concerning the execution of five Tamil students on January 2, 2006, all 13 accused were acquitted due to lack of evidence. The case had long been marked by serious threats against the survivors and witnesses, which forced the victims' family members to flee Sri Lanka.

### **Welikada Prison Incident, 2012**

In this case, 27 prisoners were killed while 43 were injured during what later came to light as a coordinated operation to eliminate certain identified prisoners. This case too has been marked by extensive intimidation of victims and witnesses, and attempts to portray those accused as victims of political victimization.



Please scan the above QR Code for more information  
on Emblematic cases.



The legal framework in Sri Lanka is marred by the prevalence of repressive laws, epitomized by the enduring presence of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). Originally intended as a temporary measure, the PTA has morphed into a tool utilized to suppress opposition voices and perpetuate state-sanctioned violence. Its implementation has resulted in arbitrary detentions, torture fundamentally undermining principles of justice and human rights while fostering a culture of impunity. Recent attempts at legislative reform purportedly aimed at addressing these issues have instead exacerbated the situation by further restricting freedoms of expression and association, thus eroding democratic norms and heightening societal tensions.

Moreover, the Online Safety Act (OSA) and other initiatives are a reminder of the continuing challenges in Sri Lanka. Concurrently, the Anti-Terrorism Bill (ATB) has drawn criticism for its potential to perpetuate state repression and infringe upon due process rights. In sum, the persistence of repressive laws not only stifles dissent but also engenders an atmosphere of fear and mistrust, impeding efforts towards reconciliation and national unity, and hindering the advancement of a more inclusive and just society in Sri Lanka.

The landscape of language rights intersects with broader issues of governance and human rights, encapsulating a complex dynamic. The prominence afforded to the Sinhala language in governmental and public spheres has historically marginalized linguistic minorities, exacerbating feelings of exclusion and disenfranchisement among Tamil-speaking communities. This linguistic disparity has not only perpetuated social divisions but has also been emblematic of deeper systemic inequalities within the country. Efforts to address these disparities, such as the implementation of language policies, have often been insufficient or ineffective, failing to adequately protect and promote the linguistic rights of minority groups. Consequently, the unresolved tensions surrounding language rights contribute to a broader narrative of injustice and discrimination, hindering progress towards genuine reconciliation and societal harmony in Sri Lanka.

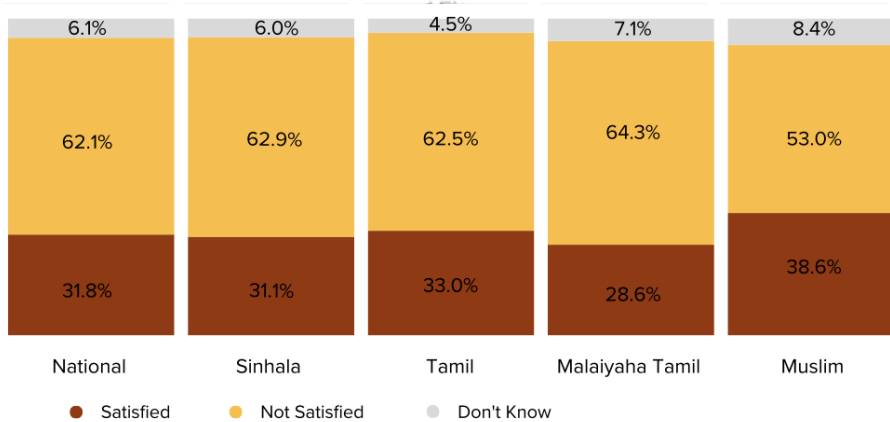
CPA's research in the North and East demonstrates accusations against the Department of Archaeology and others of bias towards promoting Buddhist historicity. From Kuchchaveli to Kurunthumalai, lands belonging to and used by minorities are being appropriated, disrupting religious inclusivity and coexistence. Work done by the Department of Archaeology and other actors often target Hindu worship sites, asserting they were once Buddhist, triggering conflict and threatening livelihoods. For example, in Thannimurippu, Mullaitivu, conflicts have arisen over the religious site in Kurunthumalai. Another example is the Vedukkunaarimalai temple in Vavuniya that has seen for several years violence and tension. Similar concerns persist in Pulmoddai, Trincomalee with increasing numbers of newly emerging Buddhist sites. The following images capture contested sites in Kurunthumalai, Kuchchaveli and Vedukkunari Hill.



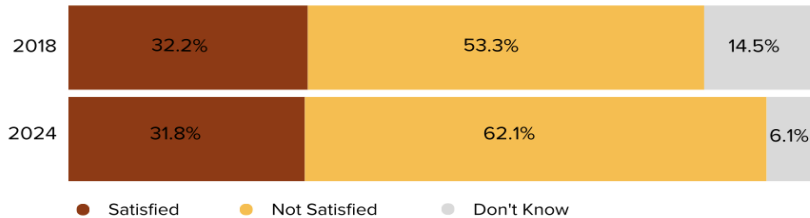
Please scan the above QR Code to watch the full photo story.

# Progress in addressing Reconciliation

## Satisfaction on the Progress in Addressing Reconciliation by Nationality and Ethnicity



## Satisfaction on the Progress in Addressing Reconciliation by Time



Please scan the above QR Code for more information  
on the survey.

*\*The fieldwork was conducted between 4th and 22nd of January 2024 with 1350 sample respondents.*