

21st October 2011

His Holiness

*Pope Benedict XVI
Apostolic Palace
00120 Vatican City*

Your Holiness,

Sri Lanka: Catholic Church is questioned by peace loving people for cruel attitude towards families of the disappeared

I am William Nicholas Gomes; I belong to the Holy Catholic Church, by profession I am a human rights activist and journalist. I am inspired by the church to work for justice and peace.

Today I am writing to draw your urgent attention on an urgent situation which is rightly raised by Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). Fr. Prasad Pereira obstructs the use of a national monument for the disappeared in Sri Lanka. Due to the unwise and unfriendly actions of Fr. Prasad Pereira towards families of the disappeared people the whole Church and its love towards the fellow brothers is questioned by the peace loving people.

Over the past several decades, Sri Lanka has experienced tens of thousands of enforced disappearances, the vast majority of which remain unresolved.

The national monument for the disappeared at Raddoluwa, Seeduwa is nationally and internationally known and respected place where the families of the disappeared persons gather to pay respects for their loved ones who are counted among the disappeared in Sri Lanka.

Every year a large number of the families of the disappeared gather on 27 October to have religious ceremonies and to place wreaths before the photographs of their family members. Those who have watched this moving remembrance have found that the families commemorate this day with religious fervour.

The monument is placed near St. Cecilia's church at Raddoluwa junction, in Sri Lanka.

When the monument was erected the then parish priest of the church Fr. Cyril Anthony actively cooperated in the commemorations and even allowed the Buddhist monks to have their traditional dana inside the church itself. The cooperation extended by the church was appreciated by everyone as

an expression of solidarity with the families of the disappeared. All throughout the 12 years up to now this cooperation has existed.

Unfortunately newly appointed Fr. Prasad Pereira has taken some steps to obstruct the use of these monuments. He has a build a concrete wall preventing the family members of the disappeared approaching the monument to place wreaths and pay respects. When questioned the priest have said that he himself does not have any objection of his own to the activities of the monument but that some office members of the church has some objections. However no one has come forward to express such objections. This act of disruption manifest sheer lack of sensitivity to the human suffering of a large number of families who have faced the problem of forced disappearances.

Now this priest has lodged a complaint at the local police station regarding the use of this monument. When the priest was questioned as to what legal right he has on this place he was unable to provide any legal titles. In fact the place does not belong to the church at all.

Many leading politicians including the present executive president has come and attended the ceremonies at this place. It is regarded as a place encouraging harmony and in dealing with past human rights abuses in a humane manner.

The priest's objection may disrupt the only monument to the disappeared in Sri Lanka, which has become a popular place to everyone.

Holy Father, the priests suppose to act help the Church in her mission to bear witness to an authentic humanism, grounded in truth and guided by the light of the Gospel. Holy Father, I want to share the sufferings of the families of the disappeared people, our brothers and sisters in the human family, I looking forward for your priestly blessings and prayer for the families of the disappeared people.

The first priority for the Successor of Peter was laid down by the Lord in the Upper Room in the clearest of terms: "You... strengthen your brothers" (Lk 22:32). Peter himself formulated this priority anew in his first Letter: "Always be prepared to make a defence to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet 3:15).

I am recalling your valuable words that where you have said "I had to interpret and comment on Galatians 5:13-15. I was surprised at the directness with which that passage speaks to us about the present moment: "Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'. But if you bite and devour one another, take heed that you are not consumed by one another."

These families of the disappeared people are obviously a neighbor of me, church in Sri Lanka and off course to you.

Your holiness, I remember your valuable message "Humanity is one great family".

Holy Father, the act of Fr. Prasad Pereira is definitely against the essence of "COMPENDIUM OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH", teachings of Gospel.

Christians, who believe that the Gospel sheds light on every aspect of individual and social life, will not fail to see the philosophical and theological dimensions on this urgent issue.

I request your urgent prayer and intervention on this serious situation.

Your Holiness, I remain yours most devotedly in Christ,

William Nicholas Gomes

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