

Press Release.

7 December 2023

Journalist Prageeth Eknaligoda Awarded 2023 Human Rights Prize, 13 Years After State-Sponsored Disappearance.

The ACAT Foundation will award the Human Rights Engel-du Tertre Prize on 7 December 2023 at the Cité internationale universitaire de Paris. The laureate for the year 2023 is Sri Lankan journalist Prageeth Eknaligoda, who was abducted by the military on 24 January 2010. A call for justice in Sri Lanka where up to 100,000 people have been subjected to such enforced disappearances.

Sandya Eknaligoda has been campaigning for justice to be done in favor of all victims of enforced disappearance in Sri Lanka. Among them is her spouse, journalist Prageeth Eknaligoda, who was abducted by the military more than 13 years ago. He has been selected as the winner of the Engel-du Tertre Prize by the ACAT Foundation for human dignity.

Sandya Eknaligoda, who will symbolically receive the prize on his behalf, has been invited by the Foundation to meet with authorities in France and speak to the media about enforced disappearances. She will also call upon France's support, as Sri Lanka is the second country most affected by this crime in the world with 60,000 to 100,000 victims.

In international law, "enforced disappearance" means the abduction of a person by agents of the state, without official acknowledgement. In most cases, this extremely violent punishment targets members of the opposition. It often results in torture and/or death.

Eknaligoda's press cartoons decried then President Mahinda Rajapaksa, whose brother Gotabaya was nicknamed "Terminator" in the war against the separatist Tamil movement, after being appointed commander. In response, the army abducted Prageeth Eknaligoda on 24 January 2010. In 2019, nine soldiers were expected to be tried. However, they were not immediately remanded in custody as impunity plagues the justice system.

With this Prize, Sandya Eknaligoda is calling for stronger legal action, in line with the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, that Sri Lanka ratified in 2016. In accordance with this text, French authorities have the possibility of informing the Committee on Enforced Disappearances – the UN body that monitors the application of the Convention – for Sri Lanka to be investigated by the United Nations.

The Engel-du Tertre Prize is endowed with €3,000 thanks to the support of great donors, thus giving Sandya Eknaligoda the opportunity to cope with political and legal impediments that stand in her way, as she fights for justice and truth.

"HIGHLIGHTING EKNALIGODA'S CASE WILL GIVE HOPE TO THOUSANDS OF FAMILIES."

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