

## Normalising the Abnormal – Militarisation in the North-East

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### Background

The Sri Lankan government co-sponsored UN Human Rights Council (HRC) Resolution 30/1 in October 2015 and renewed its commitments in HRC Resolution 34/1 in March 2017. A key commitment made in the HRC resolutions and a critical component of the conversation around transitional justice is meaningful security sector reform. Despite calls by numerous international bodies and repeated calls by Tamil politicians and communities, the Sri Lankan government has yet to undertake a comprehensive process to demilitarise areas in the North-East. As a result, the North-East remains under a military occupation that represses fundamental freedoms and contributes to ongoing ethnic conflict. The Sri Lankan military stands accused of atrocity crimes against the very population in which it is immersed. Tamils must live next door to—and, in some cases, work for—those who bombed, shelled and brutalised their families and communities, all with impunity. The military's presence facilitates land grabs and displacement and keeps families in ramshackle 'temporary' shelters as it utilises—and even profits from—privately owned Tamil land. This has a clear impact on livelihoods and economic growth in the region, as military-run businesses compete with private businesses on unequal terms. In fact, the military is one of the largest employers in Mullaitivu, ensuring a disturbing dependency of Tamil communities on the military for economic survival.

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The entrenchment of the military and security forces in Mullaitivu creates a pervasive and constant culture of fear and surveillance. It also further marginalises Tamil women.

ACPR and PEARL are conducting research on the effect of militarisation in the Tamil areas of the island. We have published one report: **Normalising the Abnormal – The Militarisation of Mullaitivu** and are currently researching the presence of the military in the Kilinochchi district. ACPR has also produced a report on the impact on civilian activities by the military, titled: **Civil Security Department: The Deep Militarisation of the Vanni**.

The report on militarisation found that five of the seven regional commands of the Sri Lankan Army are based in the North-East alone. Three of those regional commands have a presence in the Mullaitivu District. There are nine brigades under the command of SFHQ–Mullaitivu and at least four more brigades are based in the District. Based on figures for Sri Lankan military unites from the OISL report, even at the lower end of the spectrum, a conservative estimate of the Sri Lankan Army's presence in Mullaitivu District is 60,000 personnel – 1 soldier for every 2 civilians – making it one of the most heavily militarised regions in the world. This presence is grossly disproportionate to the country as a whole - 25% of the Sri Lankan Army is deployed in a District comprising 0.6% of the Sri Lankan population

Going forward PEARL endeavours to conduct further research on the link between militarisation and colonisation, and the role of how the institutionalisation of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism enables the military occupation. We will also look at how the state's Sinhala nation-building project directly impacts the Tamil people and attempts to dismantle the Tamil nation.