

Sri Lanka

'MOTHERS FRONT'

Since Juni 1990, members of families of persons who disappeared or who were assassinated in the years of violence from the 1980s onwards have come together in two organisations: The 'Mothers Front' (refer to 'Südasien', 2-3/91) and the 'Organisation of Families of the Disappeared'. The response to these initiatives has been tremendous, and both organisations have built up their strength in most of the Districts of the South of Sri Lanka. In February, the 'Mothers Front' held its first 'National Convention' in Colombo with women coming from 15 Districts being represented at the gathering. In the presidium at the Convention was, among others, also Mrs. Monorani Saravanamuttu, the mother of murdered journalist Richard de Zoysa. Over and over again, the women stressed the need for a peaceful approach towards the solution of the problems in Sri Lankan society and appealed to the state to tell them the whereabouts of their children. Despite an intensive propaganda campaign mounted primarily by the State to keep people away from both the Convention which was held in the morning, and the public meeting which was held in the afternoon, over 15.000 people are estimated to have attended the meeting which was addressed by 15 members of the 'Mothers Front', as well as by representatives of political parties, including the SLFP, the NSSP and the EPRLF, the MEP and all other opposition parties. In her speech, Mrs. Saravanamuttu said: "Our aim is peaceful, our methods are peaceful. We don't seek revenge. We stand for hope, not for despair. The 'Mothers Front' should grow into a watchdog for the people of Sri Lanka, so that no party in power can ever again perpetrate such violations of human rights in our land."

'Unprecedented massacre of people had taken place under cover of curbing terrorism'

The leader of the Bahujana Nidhas Party, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaranatunge said thousands of sons and husbands had disappeared. They had been brutally killed and burnt on tyres. It was unfortunate that some were perpetrating violence through senseless killings to perpetuate their politics.

She noted that it was this government which had forced the JVP and LTTE to take to arms and carry out a violent struggle. The UNP should be responsible for that situation.

Mrs. Kumaranatunge said: "We were living in a dark era today with thousands of valuable lives destroyed. Mothers were crying for their children and women were weeping for their husbands".

She added that today was a historic day as mothers had come from

every nook and corner of the country to demand for their children and challenge the government.

The All Island Organiser of the SLFP Anura Bandaranaike, MP, noted that an unprecedented massacre of people had taken place under the cover of curbing terrorism. In the history of Sri Lanka such a brutal massacre had never taken place before.

He said the present President as Prime Minister had stated in 1987 at a meeting in Beliatte that there was no evidence to link the JVP with the violence. There was no proof to tie up the JVP to the violent campaign which was taking place.

Mr. Bandaranaike observed that during the debate on the appointment of a Commission of Inquiry into the killing of Richard de

Zoysa some government members had slated the late Richard de Zoysa and made ugly remarks about his character. The government opposed the appointment of a Commission. If there was no blood on the hands of the government why did it oppose it, he asked.

He said the LTTE and JVP were terrorist organisations, but a government elected by the people cannot behave in that manner. Government was elected to provide security and protect the people.

MEP leader Dinesh Gunawardene said that 75 per cent of those youths killed were from the rural areas of the country. Even university students and school children were cruelly slain. They were killed before the eyes of their parents. That dark period was still not

over. People were still disappearing.

The MP added that around 60,000 to 70,000 youths were brutally killed by terror groups and 'politically motivated groups' to perpetuate their politics. An anti-democratic setup was taking root in the country.

NSSP leader Vasudeva Nanayakkara said government sponsored hit-squads had killed about 60,000 persons and their bodies were dumped on roadsides. The government was cornered today.

The President as Prime Minister stated it was not the JVP which was behind the scourge of violence, but now he proclaimed that he had always been opposed to terrorism.

Mr. Nanayakkara observed that 200 youths had disappeared

from the Wantharumoolai camp in Batticaloa.

The Secretary of the Mother's Front Mahinda Rajapakse, MP, said that he and fellow MPs Mangala Samaraweera and Niyathapala had received death threats from the "PRAA", which had asked them to call off the Mother's Front meeting. The threats contained in letters written in red were received by them. The letters had demanded that the media be informed about the cancellation of the meeting. They had also been asked to stop giving information to the foreign press and cease all contacts with Amnesty International.

He said mothers were not demanding for jobs or for milk food but for their missing children. They should be told whether their children were alive and if so where they were held. If

they had been killed tell that to the mothers.

Mr. Rajapakse asserted that he at one time saw 280 bodies in one day in the Hambantota district. He said that he had seen over 15,000 bodies in the district during the scourge of violence.

LSSP MP Athauda Seneviratne said that it was for the first time that a meeting of this nature had been held in the country.

He asked why those responsible for killing Richard de Zoysa were not apprehended. Thousands of lives had been lost and the situation was tragic. Why was the government not investigating these disappearances. Didn't that point to government involvement in the whole affair, he queried.

A large number of Opposition members were present at the meeting.