

**AMNESTY
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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL IS PROUD TO ANNOUNCE THE FIFTEEN WINNERS OF ITS GLOBAL POETRY COMPETITION: “SILENCED SHADOWS”

In October 2015, Amnesty invited Sri Lankans, within the country and the diaspora, to take part in a poetry competition to mark the tens of thousands disappearances the country has experienced over the decades. This includes enforced disappearances by the state as well as abductions by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and other paramilitary groups.

The competition, “Silenced Shadows”, was launched on Sri Lanka’s Day of the Disappeared. The UN ranks Sri Lanka as the country with the second highest number of enforced disappearances in the world.

Amnesty International’s Sri Lanka Campaigner, Yolanda Foster, said: “Disappearances have been a tragic fact of life for far too many Sri Lankans for far too long. Almost every family, across all communities, are still searching for lost loved ones. Many have simply given up hope of ever finding them.”

The competition provided a creative space and an opportunity to share reflections and responses to this national tragedy. In English, Tamil and Sinhala, Sri Lankans from all communities and walks of life across the world were inspired to take part.

Twelve distinguished international literary figures acted as judges for the three language panels.

"The power of poetic imagination supersedes any other imagination not because it enhances our understanding of the past, present and future, but rather because it prompts us - justifiably - to strengthen social justice and equality. This competition is a testament to the subtle force of poetry," said [Dr Rudhramoorthy Cheran](#), Associate Professor at The University of Windsor, Ontario, Canada, and one of the judges.

We are proud to announce these five winning writers of the best poems in each language. Amnesty International will publish a tri-lingual book in the autumn of 2016. Each poem will be presented in its original language and translated into the other two languages.

Winners of Silenced Shadows:

English

- Malathi de Alwis
- Radhia Rameez
- Basil Fernando
- Shash Trevett

- Hasitha Wickremasinghe

Sinhala

- S. Dhanushka Madushanka keerthirathna
- Punya Samarakoon
- Jayani Abeysekara
- Noran Yasislal
- Lalith Manage

Tamil

- Raheema Faizal
- Daya Thevi
- Keshayinie Edmund
- Joseph Daniel
- Theban Sivapalan

[You can read the winning poems here!](#)

Background

Since the 1980s, it is estimated that there have been at least 80,000 cases of enforced disappearances in Sri Lanka. Although Sri Lanka has acknowledged the importance of addressing enforced disappearances, it still has a long way to go in resolving the tens of thousands of outstanding complaints it received, even though some of those inquiries identified alleged perpetrators.¹ The government signed the UN Convention on Enforced Disappearances in December 2015, but has not yet ratified the Convention or enacted legislation criminalizing the offence. It has also started discussions on the creation of an Office on Missing Persons and the Cabinet has approved a proposal to issue certificates of absence rather than death certificates to families of the disappeared. Neither initiative, however, is ready for implementation.

Questions remain about how truth mechanisms - and the Office of Missing Persons in particular - would relate to other mechanisms and efforts to ensure justice, truth, reparation and guarantees of non-repetition which the government has committed to establish and how to ensure that people who approach them would also be assisted to seek justice against alleged perpetrators if they choose to do so.

Amnesty International has made consistent calls for the Government of Sri Lanka to ratify the Enforced Disappearances Convention and enact legislation criminalizing enforced disappearances

¹ The OISL received a confidential list of 318 alleged perpetrators named by the All Island Commission of Inquiry into Involuntary Removal and Disappearances of Certain Persons which examined 10,136 complaints and submitted its Final Report in 2001.

