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## PUBLIC STATEMENT

### **SRI LANKA: Chemmani graves need proper investigation**

Amnesty International today appealed to the Attorney General of Sri Lanka to allow the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRC) to jointly carry out preliminary investigations of the site at Chemmani, Jaffna with the help of leading forensic experts in the country. Chemmani is alleged to be a place where scores of bodies of people who “disappeared” in mid-1996 have been clandestinely buried.

The investigations arose from detailed statements by members of the security forces recently convicted in connection with a rape, abduction and murder of a school girl, two of her relatives and a neighbour. Their bodies had been recovered from this site. It was at the end of their trial that revelations about many more bodies having been disposed off at this place had been made by one of the members of the security forces.

Amnesty international appealed to the Attorney General to ensure that the CID and HRC investigations were properly conducted. The organization also appealed to the Attorney General to ensure that the investigations of the site, including any exhumation was impartially and independently conducted in such a way that any evidence collected was admissible in court. It suggested the government invite international forensic experts with specific experience of excavating and examining *in situ* relevant to the specific type of exhumation required at Chemmani.

In a report published last year, Amnesty International said it had found reliable evidence suggesting that bodies of as many as 600 people “disappeared” in the area may have been disposed of in lavatory pits, disused wells and shallow graves.

It is the experience of leading forensic experts around the world that the exhumation of bodies piled on top of each other in restricted places, such as lavatory pits and wells, is one of the most complex forms of exhumations to carry out. The organization therefore urges that, if indeed this is confirmed by the preliminary investigations, that forensic experts with experience of exhumations of bodies in such conditions be invited to assist local experts in the exhumations.

Amnesty International also appealed to the Attorney General to ensure that, while forensic expertise is sought, all necessary steps are taken to safeguard the area suspected of containing the mass graves, including by ensuring round-the-clock security.