



අතුරුදහන් වූ තැනැත්තන් පිළිබඳ කාර්යාලය
காணாமல் போன ஆட்கள் பற்றிய அலுவலகம்;
OFFICE ON MISSING PERSONS

වාර්ෂික වාර්තාව
ஆண்டு அறிக்கை
ANNUAL REPORT

2022

නො.40, 03 වන මහල, බුත්ගමුව පාර, රාජගිරිය
இல.40, 03ம் மாடி, புத்கமுவ வீதி, ராஜகிரிய
No. 40, Level 03, Buthgamuwa Road, Rajagiriya,

Abbreviations

CoA	Certificate of Absence
CoD	Certificate of Death
CoI	Commission of Inquiry
CTF	Consultation Task Force
DNA	Department of National Achieves
EU	European Union
GSP	Generalized Scheme of Preference
ICRC	International Committee of Red Cross
INGOs	International Non-governmental Organization
MIA	Missing in Action and Enforced Disappearances
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSD	Management Services Department
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
OMP	Office of Missing Persons
PC	President Counsel
RTI	Right to Information
SLIDA	Sri Lanka Institute of Development Administration
UN	United Nations
UNWG	United Nations Working Group
UNWGIED	United Nations Working Group on Involuntary Disappearances
WGIED	Working Group on Involuntary Disappearances

Table of Contents

1. Message from the Chairperson
2. Preface
3. Introduction
4. Objective of the OMP Act No : 14 of 2016
5. The mandate
6. Vision & Institutional Priorities (Working Principals)
7. Regional Presence
8. Programmatic Update
9. Legal Policy & Research Unit
 - 9.1 Inquire Process
 - 9.2 Challenges
 - 9.3 Progress So Far
10. Data Entry Unit
11. Vic:m & Family Support Unit
 - 11.1 Missing Persons Data Forms
 - 11.2 VFS External Collabora:ons
12. Finance & Procurement Unit
13. Human Resources & Administration Unit
 - 13.1 Staff Recruitment
14. Communication & Outreach Unit
 - 14.1 Engagement with the Media
 - 14.2 Digital Presence
15. Right to Information
16. The Challenges in 2022
17. Appreciation

1. Message from the Chairperson

The establishment of the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) in Sri Lanka in 2018, as per Act No. 14 of 2016, is regarded as a significant stride toward ascertaining the truth regarding the status of missing and disappeared individuals. The OMP, endowed with authoritative powers acquired through legislative channels, possesses a distinct mandate to conclusively determine the fate of missing persons. Comprising seven members appointed by the parliamentary council, the current incumbents have been selected based on their demonstrated expertise and experience in the realms of transitional justice, quasi-judicial procedures, and the handling of public grievances.

Through rigorous efforts, the OMP has successfully compiled and released a comprehensive list of missing persons and has initiated inquiries into their circumstances. This accomplishment underscores the commitment of the OMP to fulfilling its mandate and contributing to the broader objectives of transitional justice in the context of addressing cases of missing and disappeared persons.

Throughout the current calendar year, the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) has made significant strides across various domains, with notable emphasis on the operationalization of its office and engagement initiatives targeting the families of missing and disappeared individuals. Additionally, the OMP has undertaken pivotal legal and policy interventions, furthering individual investigations and inquiries. Noteworthy achievements include the reception, analysis, and documentation of information pertaining to several emblematic cases.

Since June 2018, the OMP has functioned as an observer in the excavation of an 11-mass grave, actively contributing to the investigative process by suggesting measures aimed at bolstering public confidence and extending financial support. In order to streamline the processing of complaints, the OMP has inaugurated a regional office in Kilinochchi during this reporting period, which serves the dual purpose of facilitating referral services and supporting future investigations. This expansion has brought the total number of regional offices to five.

As part of its commitment to memorialize the missing and disappeared, the OMP convened a virtual commemoration of the International Day of the Disappeared in Sri Lanka. This event garnered participation from ministers, representatives of civil society organizations, and members of families directly affected by the issue. The commemoration served as a platform for fostering awareness, dialogue, and solidarity surrounding the plight of the missing and disappeared within the Sri Lankan context.

Furthermore, the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) has established collaborative affiliations with key governmental entities, including the Controller General of Immigration and Emigration, the Department of Immigration and Emigration, the Department of the Registrar General (births and deaths), and the Office on Reparations. This collaborative framework is designed to address issues related to duplicate entries and the submission of multiple complaints, thereby fostering efficiency and coherence in addressing pertinent matters.

A notable interaction transpired between the OMP and a five-member delegation from the European Union (EU), which engaged in discussions with OMP officials to evaluate Sri Lanka's progress in fulfilling commitments to adhere to 27 international conventions, a precondition for the Generalized Scheme of Preference Plus (GSP+) trade concession. The delegation expressed appreciation for the substantial contributions made by the OMP toward the success and advancement of this process.

Additionally, the OMP has engaged in significant dialogues and interactions, including meetings with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) team, diplomatic communities, donor agencies, and embassies. These interactions represent pivotal developments in the activities of the OMP over the past year, underscoring its commitment to transparency, cooperation, and sustained progress in the pursuit of its mandate.

The Commission is vested with the authority to scrutinize the determinations of preceding Commissions, with the primary objective of verifying potential transgressions of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, as identified by those antecedent bodies. In the event that such violations are confirmed, the Commission is additionally tasked with assessing the extent to which the recommendations proffered by the antecedent Commissions in relation to accountability have been executed. Moreover, the Commission is mandated to delineate the requisite measures that ought to be adopted in the future to advance the objectives of accountability, thereby ensuring comprehensive adherence to international legal standards and principles.

Moreover, the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) has undertaken measures to cultivate a conducive operational environment, aiming to forestall the recurrence of incidents and enhance its capacity for addressing reported complaints. The OMP, in diligent pursuit of its mandate, systematically tracks and follows up on all newly submitted complaints. Notably, a review of records spanning the past 12 months attests to the absence of reported complaints pertaining to enforced disappearances during this period. This discernible trend underscores the efficacy of the OMP's efforts in fostering an environment that discourages such egregious violations and demonstrates its commitment to the prevention and resolution of cases related to missing persons.

Despite the challenges imposed by the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) maintains the steadfast conviction that the realization of truth and justice for the families of missing and disappeared persons is imperative for achieving reconciliation in Sri Lanka. To this end, the OMP, in collaboration with its Board members, staff, civil society organizations, families of the missing persons, and strategic partners, has diligently laid a robust foundation. This foundation is envisioned as a critical precursor for the prospective commission and its officials, providing a substantive framework for the full operationalization of the OMP's mandate. The commitment of all stakeholders is evident, and the OMP pledges to execute its functions and duties conscientiously, seeking the utmost cooperation from relevant state agencies and departments in order to fulfill its crucial role in addressing the complexities surrounding missing and disappeared persons.

Chairperson

Office on Missing Persons

2. PREFACE

The establishment of the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) in Sri Lanka constitutes a noteworthy milestone, indicative of the government's earnest commitment to comprehensively address the intricate and emotionally charged matter of missing and disappeared persons. Enacted through the Office on Missing Persons (Establishment, Administration, and Discharge of Functions) Act, No. 14 of 2016 (OMP Act), the legislation, passed in the Parliament in 2016, underscores the nation's unwavering dedication to confronting and redressing this enduring and complex issue. This institutional framework reflects the government's proactive measures to address the historical challenges associated with missing and disappeared persons within the country.

In acknowledgment of the imperative for efficacious collaboration, an amendment to the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) Act was introduced in 2017. This amendment facilitated the establishment of contractual agreements with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The principal objective of this amendment was to augment the capabilities of the OMP and extend its operational scope by leveraging the specialized expertise and resources offered by reputable NGOs. This strategic amendment reflects the commitment to fostering synergistic partnerships and enhancing the OMP's effectiveness through the integration of external organizational capacities.

In the year 2018, the OMP was formally instituted as the inaugural entity in Sri Lanka singularly committed to addressing the entirety of missing persons cases. This formal establishment signifies a pivotal transformation in the government's strategy, transitioning from episodic and ad-hoc mechanisms, as well as commissions of inquiry with circumscribed mandates, to the creation of a permanent and autonomous state institution. This institutionalization reflects a substantive evolution in the government's approach, underscoring a sustained commitment to comprehensively and independently addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by cases of missing persons.

Preceding mechanisms, while yielding commendable recommendations, encountered limitations in furnishing the sought-after answers for the numerous families diligently seeking information about their missing loved ones. The Office on Missing Persons (OMP) is poised to alleviate this profound and pervasive distress by undertaking a focused mission to elucidate the fate and whereabouts of individuals who have gone missing or disappeared in the context of conflict, political unrest, civil disturbances, or instances of enforced disappearances. This commitment underscores the OMP's dedication to addressing the longstanding and widespread humanitarian concerns associated with missing persons within the framework of conflict-related circumstances.

Under the stewardship of its inaugural Chairperson, Saliya Peiris PC, Retired Justice Upali Abeyratne and presently led by Chairperson Mr. Mahesh Katulanda, the OMP has undergone successive phases

of development, strategically oriented towards enhancing its efficacy and responsiveness. This third iteration of the OMP Board remains steadfast in its commitment to the mission of pursuing truth, justice, and reconciliation for the families affected by cases of missing persons in Sri Lanka. The Board's unwavering dedication reflects a continuity of purpose and signifies an ongoing evolution in the pursuit of the OMP's objectives within the context of addressing the complex and poignant challenges associated with missing persons.

The Office on Missing Persons (OMP) maintains unwavering commitment to the pursuit of truth and the provision of solace to the families affected by instances of missing and disappeared persons. The present annual report serves as an illuminating document, delineating the substantial advancements achieved, the encountered challenges, and the resolute determination of the OMP to diligently execute its mandate. The report underscores the OMP's persistent efforts to address the profound and enduring impact of immeasurable loss on affected families, emphasizing its commitment to the principles of transparency, accountability, and justice within the framework of international humanitarian standards.

Throughout the duration of the year 2022, the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) dedicated substantial resources to the investigative process concerning the 6,000-plus complaints received within the timeframe of 2021. In a strategic initiative, the OMP temporarily suspended the acceptance of complaints at both its Head Office and Regional Offices. This measure was implemented to concentrate efforts on ensuring the efficacy and thoroughness of inquiries into the complaints already in possession, reflecting the organization's commitment to the meticulous examination and resolution of reported cases. The temporary cessation of new complaints intake underscores the prioritization of quality and effectiveness in the ongoing inquiry process.

Following the suspension of complaint intake in February and the acceleration of the inquiry process initiated in late 2021, the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) actively conducted a comprehensive series of over 2,000 inquiry panels nationwide throughout the year 2022. This proactive engagement underscores the OMP's commitment to a rigorous and expansive inquiry process, facilitating a thorough examination of reported cases across diverse geographic locations within the country. The deliberate efforts undertaken by the OMP in hosting these inquiry panels reflect its dedication to addressing the complexities associated with missing persons cases and ensuring a broad and inclusive approach to the investigative procedures.

3. INTRODUCTION

The legislative framework governing the functions and powers of the Office of Missing Persons is encapsulated in the Office of Missing Persons¹ (Establishment, Administration, and Discharge of Functions) Act No. 14 of 2016², enacted in August 2016. This legislative instrument delineates the procedures and guidelines pertinent to the powers and functions delegated to the Office, encompassing the establishment of a comprehensive database of missing persons, provision of assistance to their relatives, facilitation of search and tracing endeavors, and the regulation of all matters related to, or incidental to, the implementation of the provisions enshrined in the OMP Act.

The commitment and coordination of the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) persistently align with the humanitarian relief objectives outlined in the aforementioned legislative framework. Effectuated on 28 February 2018, the OMP commenced operational activities subsequent to the appointment of seven commissioners, a process facilitated in accordance with the recommendations put forth by the Constitutional Council. This milestone underscored the institutionalization of the OMP, affirming its pivotal role in addressing issues related to missing persons and demonstrating the government's commitment to transitional justice and human rights.

The mandate of the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) is delineated to encompass several key objectives. Primarily, the OMP is tasked with elucidating the circumstances surrounding cases of missing persons. In pursuit of comprehensive transitional justice, the OMP is empowered to formulate recommendations directed at pertinent authorities to mitigate the risk of recurrence. Furthermore, the mandate extends to safeguarding the rights and interests of both missing and disappeared persons and their respective relatives. Additionally, the OMP is charged with identifying avenues of redress for individuals who have gone missing or disappeared.³

A pivotal component of its function is the establishment of a centralized database wherein all available information pertaining to missing persons is systematically compiled. This multifaceted mandate underscores the OMP's role as a vital institution dedicated to addressing the complexities surrounding missing persons and contributing to the broader objectives of accountability, human rights protection, and the prevention of future occurrences.

Moreover, the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) is entrusted with a comprehensive array of functions and duties concerning the resolution of complaints lodged by affected parties. These responsibilities extend to the issuance of correspondences to the relatives of missing and disappeared persons, facilitating the Department of the Registrar General in issuing Certificates of Absence (COA). Additionally, the OMP is mandated to provide, or facilitate the provision of, administrative assistance

¹ Hereafter referred to as the OMP

² Hereafter referred to as the OMP Act

³ OMP Act, Section 10

and welfare services, encompassing psycho-social support for the relatives of the missing and disappeared.

Further, the OMP is empowered to formulate recommendations directed at relevant authorities for the granting of reparations to the missing or disappeared person or their relatives. It is also tasked with the development and enforcement of a robust system for victim and witness protection. A pivotal aspect of its mandate involves the creation, management, and maintenance of a comprehensive database, incorporating all pertinent details related to complaints lodged concerning missing and disappeared persons.

Moreover, the OMP is charged with fostering public awareness regarding the causes, incidents, and effects of missing and disappeared persons. It actively endeavors to facilitate support and understanding among the general public to address the diverse needs of the affected parties and ensure access to economic, psycho-social, legal, and administrative support.⁴ These multifaceted functions collectively underscore the OMP's pivotal role in addressing the complexities associated with missing persons and advancing the broader goals of accountability, justice, and human rights protection.

The Office on Missing Persons (OMP) is vested with expansive authority to formulate gender-sensitive norms and guidelines, appoint and dismiss personnel, and establish units as deemed necessary for its optimal functionality.⁵ Additionally, the OMP possesses the prerogative to proffer recommendations to various state authorities on a diverse spectrum of issues. These encompass strategies to prevent future disappearances, methodologies for the commemoration and acknowledgment of disappearances, procedures for handling both identifiable and unidentifiable remains, the dissemination of information pertaining to missing persons issues for public awareness, and proposals for the development of national laws and regulations pertaining to missing persons.

This comprehensive authority underscores the OMP's pivotal role in addressing multifaceted challenges associated with missing persons, while actively contributing to the formulation of policies and practices aimed at ensuring transparency, accountability, and the protection of human rights.

The legislative framework, as stipulated by the relevant Act, confers upon the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) extensive authority to receive complaints, initiate inquiries, and undertake investigations into the whereabouts of missing or disappeared individuals to facilitate its investigative processes. The OMP is empowered to take all necessary measures to examine pertinent matters, inclusive of the issuance of summons to compel the appearance of individuals before the OMP or the production of documents and other relevant items.⁶

⁴ OMP Act, Section 13

⁵ OMP Act, Section 11

⁶ OMP Act, Section 13 (1) (k)

Furthermore, the Act grants the OMP the authority to institute procedures for accepting sensitive information or information in camera, with due consideration for maintaining confidentiality. Additionally, the OMP is authorized to apply to a Magistrate's Court for permission to conduct excavation or exhumation activities while serving in an observer capacity. The OMP is entitled to request essential assistance from any state actor, undertake searches at sites of detention without a warrant, and, following due consideration, report offenses that have been identified to a relevant law enforcement or prosecuting authority. These extensive powers are integral to the OMP's ability to conduct thorough and impartial investigations in pursuit of its mandate within the parameters established by the Act.⁷

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE OMP ACT NUMBER 14 of 2016:

To ensure that all necessary measures are taken:

- a) To establish suitable mechanisms for the searching and tracing of missing persons, and to elucidate the circumstances under which such individuals went missing and determine their fate;

- b) To proffer recommendations to pertinent authorities aimed at mitigating the incidents of individuals falling under the designation of 'missing persons' as defined by the Act;

- c) To safeguard the rights and interests of missing persons and their respective relatives, as delineated in accordance with the provisions set forth in the Act;

- d) To identify appropriate avenues of redress to which missing persons or their relatives may avail themselves in accordance with the stipulations outlined in the Act.

5. THE MANDATE

The OMP has a mandate to;

- a) Conduct searches and tracing activities for missing persons, establish suitable mechanisms for the aforementioned endeavors, and elucidate the circumstances under which such individuals became missing;

⁷ OMP Act, Section 12

- b) Formulate recommendations to pertinent authorities aimed at addressing the occurrence of missing persons;
- c) Safeguard the rights and interests of missing persons and their respective relatives in accordance with the provisions delineated in the Act;
- d) Identify channels for redress to which missing persons and the relatives of missing persons are entitled, and subsequently apprise the missing person (in the event of being found alive) or the relative thereof, of the available remedial measures in accordance with established protocols;
- e) Aggregate information pertaining to missing persons acquired through ongoing or previous procedures conducted by diverse institutions, organizations, government departments, Commissions of Inquiry, and the Special Presidential Commission of Inquiry. Centralize all pertinent data within the Database established under the Office on Missing Persons Act;
- f) Undertake all requisite measures deemed necessary to attain the objectives outlined in the Act.

Moreover, the jurisdiction of the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) shall encompass individuals classified as missing persons, irrespective of the time period during which such persons became missing.

6. VISION, MISSION AND INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES (WORKING PRINCIPLES)⁸

Vision and Mission

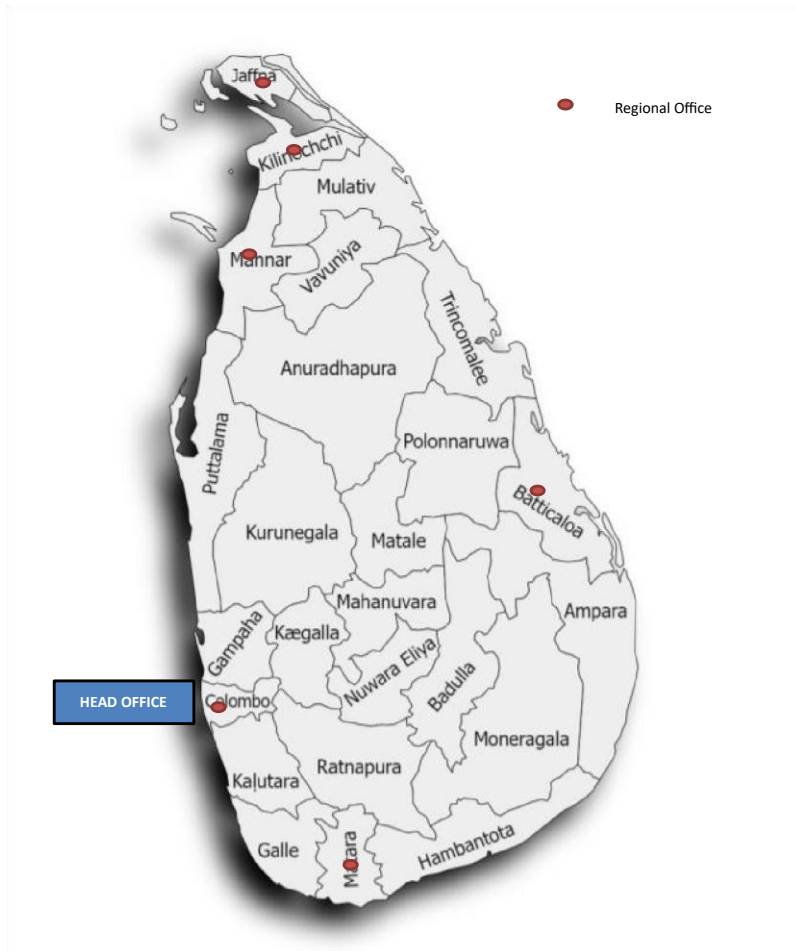
Our Vision	<i>A nation characterized by the equitable dispensation of justice, wherein the reconciliation process is enhanced and fostered.</i>
Our Mission	<i>To safeguard the rights of individuals who have gone missing or disappeared, along with the rights of their families, as an integral component of the national reconciliation mechanism.</i>

⁸ OMP Strategic Roadmap 2023-2025

<p>Core Outcomes</p> <p>Preventing the recurrence of individuals going missing and disappearing in the future and ensuring the rights of those who have experienced such circumstances.</p>	<p>Outcome 1 (Objective): Prevention measures</p> <p>Mitigating the incidence of individuals going missing by implementing preventive strategies, engaging in educational initiatives, and undertaking early intervention measures, particularly in cases where children, young people, and adults recurrently experience instances of going missing.</p>	<p>Outcome 2: Protection measures</p> <p>Diminishing the potential for harm to individuals who go missing through the establishment of a customized, risk-oriented approach by local agencies in response to cases involving missing children, young people, and adults. Ensuring collaborative efforts among these agencies to locate the individuals swiftly and conclude cases both locally and nationally.</p>	<p>Outcome 3: Provision of remedial options</p> <p>Furnishing missing individuals and their families with support and guidance through expeditious referrals and ensuring comprehensive understanding of the avenues for accessing assistance and support services</p>
---	--	---	---

7. REGIONAL PRESENCE

The Office on Missing Persons (OMP) operates nationally, with its central administrative hub situated in Colombo and additional Regional and Sub-Regional Offices strategically established. As part of its mandate, the OMP is tasked with establishing a total of 12 Regional Offices, and presently, five have been instituted, with the most recent addition during the reporting period in Kilinochchi.



REGIONAL OFFICES

Jaffna- No. 124, Adiyapatham Road, Kalviyankadu, Jaffna

Telephone No: 021-221 9400

Kilinochchi- A9 Road, Near the road, Kilinochchi.

Telephone No: 021-228 6030

Mannar- No. 5, Station Road, Mannar.

Telephone No: 023-222 2083

Batticaloa- No. 124, Central Road, Batticaloa

Telephone No: 065-222 4532

Matara – No. 54, Dharmarama Road, Matara

Telephone No: 041- 222 4046

8. PROGRAMMATIC UPDATE

Under the leadership of Chairperson Mr. Mahesh Katulanda, the Office on Missing Persons (OMP), following a comprehensive review of its strategic plan for the year 2022, has delineated the ensuing programmatic strategy for the aforementioned year.

Preventive Measures: Reducing the incidence of missing individuals by implementing awareness-raising initiatives and early intervention in cases involving repeated instances of children, young people, and adults going missing.

Protection Measures: Mitigating the risk of harm to individuals who go missing by ensuring that local agencies implement targeted, risk-based interventions to promptly locate the missing person and expedite the resolution of cases both at the local and national levels.

Provision of Remedial Measures: Furnishing support and guidance to missing persons and their families by promptly facilitating referrals and ensuring comprehensive understanding of avenues to seek assistance and support.

The heightened support garnered by the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) and the agreements forged with various Non-Governmental Organizations, both domestic and international, underscore the steadfast commitment demonstrated by the OMP throughout the year in pursuit of its objectives.

9. LEGAL, POLICY AND RESEARCH UNIT

The Office on Missing Persons (OMP) is entrusted with a mandate to safeguard the rights of individuals who have gone missing or disappeared, as well as those of their relatives. Additionally, the OMP is directed to facilitate access for families of the missing and disappeared to a spectrum of support services encompassing economic, psycho-social, legal, and administrative domains.⁹ Furthermore, the OMP is vested with the authority to proffer recommendations to state authorities aimed at averting the recurrence of disappearances, establishing protocols for the dignified handling of human remains, and enhancing the social and economic conditions of both missing and disappeared persons and their respective relatives.¹⁰

In fulfilling the aforementioned mandate, the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) has formulated legal and policy recommendations pertaining to Certificates of Absence (COAs). Additionally, the OMP has undertaken the issuance of Reports to families of the missing and disappeared, facilitating their ability to procure COAs, CODs & Family revival payment.

The Legal, Policy, and Research Unit predominantly managed inquiries throughout the year 2022. The Unit employed a phase-based categorization system for the complaints received until¹¹ February 2022, strategically designed to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the inquiry-handling process. The delineation of phases is as follows:

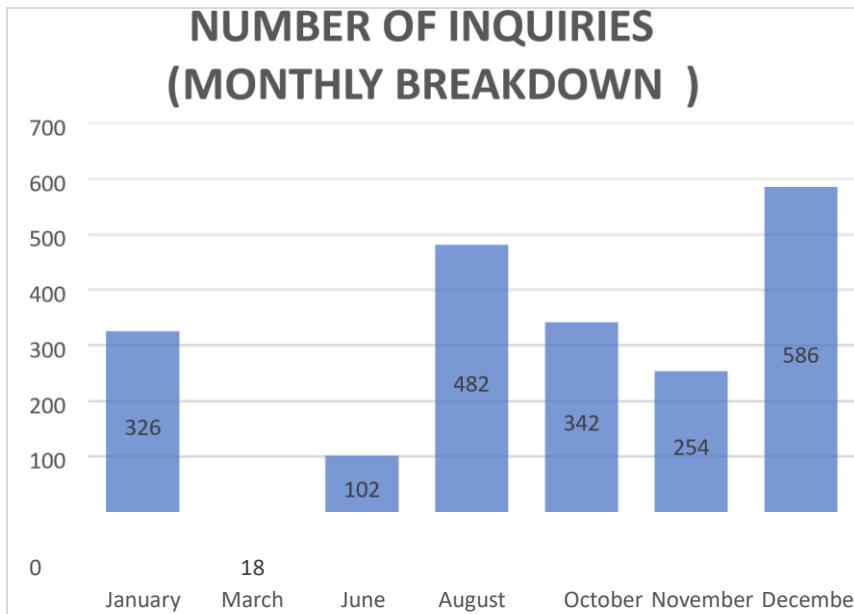
⁹ OMP Act, Section 2 (b), 10 (c), 13 (e), (f)

¹⁰ OMP Act, Section 13 (k) (i), (iii), (viii)

¹¹ Section 12, OMP Act

1. Phase 1 : All complaints post-2000
2. Phase 2 : All complaints between 1980-2000
3. Phase 3 : All complaints before 1980

The preponderance of inquiries conducted in 2022 pertains to Phase 1 of the aforementioned categorization, as a significant proportion of the complaints registered in this phase are recent, characterized by well-maintained and traceable documentation. The Office on Missing Persons (OMP) has notably executed over 2000 inquiries, encompassing all locations of our sub-regional presence, as well as the central head office, during the year 2022. The OMP remains steadfast in its commitment to sustaining these efficacious efforts in the forthcoming years.



As the nation undergoes a process of recovery from the effects of a prolonged pandemic, protracted lockdowns, and quarantine measures, and as normalcy is gradually restored, the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) has experienced a notable increase in the opportunity to conduct more inquiries in outlying stations.

9.1 Inquiry Process

The Legal, Policy, and Research Unit of the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) has implemented a streamlined process for managing pre-inquiry and post-inquiry phases, aiming to optimize workflow efficiency and facilitate the seamless exchange of information.

Upon the lodgment of a complaint by the support unit on behalf of the victim, a dedicated file shall be assigned for the complainant, containing a preliminary report and pertinent documents extracted from the portfolio. The file organization will be structured based on the complainant's district. Prior to the initiation of an inquiry, the Data Management Unit will furnish the files designated for

consideration during the panel hearings. The Legal Unit will meticulously verify and validate these files, subsequently dispatching them via courier to the respective regional office or the Divisional Secretariat office in the district earmarked for the inquiry.¹² Following the aforementioned processing, the concerned complainant will receive an official letter notifying them of the impending inquiry, accompanied by a subsequent reminder conveyed through a telephone call.

Inquiry Panels typically comprise 3-4 individuals, with one designated as the lead inquirer and the others providing assistance. The Heads of Panels are eminent figures within the realms of Law and Investigation, appointed with the approval of the board based on recommendations put forth by the Legal Unit. In light of the prevailing economic challenges in Sri Lanka, the Panels endeavor to conduct inquiries in consolidated batches.

Complainants were duly reminded to bring a comprehensive set of documents, encompassing as many of the following as possible, when attending the inquiry:

1. OMP Data Form
2. NIC / Driving License of the Missing or Disappeared Person
3. Birth Certificate of the Missing or Disappeared Person
4. A Picture of the Missing or Disappeared Person
5. NIC of the Complainant
6. Birth Certificate of the Complainant
7. Affidavit
8. Letter produced by the Complainant
9. Marriage Certificate / Offspring's Birth Certificate of the Missing or Disappeared Person
10. Affidavit (About the relation to the Missing or Disappeared Person)
11. Documents with regards to permanent residence signed by Grama Niladhari
12. Documents with regards to permanent residence signed by Divisional Secretariat
13. Copy of the Police Complaint
14. ICRC/UNWG Papers
15. Papers / Documents by other Commissions
16. COD (Certificate of Death) of the Missing or Disappeared Person
17. Document on registering Marriage
18. COA (Certificate of Absence)
19. News Articles about the Missing or Disappeared Person
20. Other unit's requested documents
21. Other Documents

The inquiry Panel will systematically acquire information pertaining to the missing or disappeared person and the circumstances surrounding the incident of disappearance. This process entails the compilation of Personal Information concerning the missing or disappeared individual, along with details about the day or incident when they were reported missing and last seen. The investigation

¹² In the event couriering is impossible to a Divisional Secretariat office or an RO, the offices are given access to a database that contains all the details required.

will be diligently conducted relying on the information furnished by the relatives of the missing person and the complainant.

The inquiry panels will additionally request the presence of an additional witness, who will be alongside the complainant during the inquiry proceedings. Subsequent to the submission made by the complainant, the witnesses will be individually interrogated, with identical questions posed to ascertain alignment and corroboration of information.

Following the inquiry, the panel will determine the requisite provisions to be offered by the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) to the complainant. The provisional support encompasses a spectrum of measures such as Certificates of Absence (COAs), Certificates of Death (COD), reparations, revival payments, and additional psycho-social assistance as deemed necessary.

Subsequent to the inquiry, the panel generates a confidential report. This report is compiled through unanimous agreement, allowing panel members the opportunity to articulate any reservations; however, it is noteworthy that instances of expressed lack of confidence are rare in practice.

The mandate of the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) primarily encompasses three categories of complaints falling within its legal jurisdiction. These include:

1. Missing or Disappeared Persons during and because of the Civil War
2. Missing or Disappeared Persons during and because of major political unrest or civil disturbances.
3. Enforced Disappearances due to Political Reasons

Upon the conclusion of inquiry reports, wherein categorization is undertaken to determine alignment with the OMP mandate, and recommendations proposed during the inquiry are incorporated, the files are subsequently returned to the Legal Unit. Following the finalization of database updates, color coding system, the inquiry panel is duly remunerated for their time and effort.

Applicants and witnesses are remunerated for their transportation costs incurred in travelling to the locations of the inquiry panels.

9.2 Challenges

One of the principal challenges observed by the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) during this period, particularly in relation to inquiries, entailed a series of protests conducted by unidentified individuals and groups in close proximity to the inquiry locations. These entities vehemently sought to obstruct complainants from participating in the inquiry proceedings. The underlying reasons for these protests were rooted in misconstrued ideologies pertaining to compensation and reparations, as well as demands for international justice. Despite these challenges, the inquiry processes were nonetheless conducted amid the protests following peaceful negotiations.

Furthermore, the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) observed instances where certain complainants failed to fulfill the stipulated documentation requirements, leading to an absence of sufficient supportive documents to bolster the complaint. The deficiency in such documentation had implications for the seamless progression of the procedural processes.

9.3 Progress So Far

During Phase 1 of the Complaints Categorization, a total of 6,025 complaints were classified. As of December 31, 2022, the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) conducted a cumulative total of 2647 inquiries, of which 2,110 were completed within the calendar year 2022. Subsequent to these inquiries, 269 complainant files, inclusive of recommendations, were forwarded to the Registrar-General, and 218 files were sent to the Reparations Office with corresponding recommendations. This leaves a remaining 3,378 inquiries to be undertaken within Phase 1 to ensure its comprehensive resolution for the upcoming year. It is asserted that this target is attainable, considering the mitigated post-COVID conditions and the increased freedom of movement within the districts.

10. DATA ENTRY UNIT

The Data Management Unit (DMU) within the Office of Missing Persons (OMP) assumes a pivotal role in the meticulous and effective upkeep of a comprehensive database. The primary mandate of the DMU is to guarantee the precise documentation and monitoring of complaints, as well as their progression throughout the investigative process.

The database overseen by the Data Management Unit (DMU) encompasses a diverse array of complaints received by the Office of Missing Persons (OMP). This compilation comprises complaints directly submitted to the OMP, those forwarded by the United Nations, and complaints filed with the Police. Through the consolidation of information from these varied sources, the DMU establishes a unified platform that fosters a comprehensive approach to addressing cases related to missing persons.

As of March 2022, the database registers a substantial volume of complaints directly submitted to the Office of Missing Persons (OMP), totaling 21,374 cases. At this juncture, the acceptance of new complaints was temporarily suspended, primarily to uphold consistency within the database and initiate the inquiry process, to which all complaints will be subject. This procedural step aims to facilitate the OMP's commitment to delivering justice to individuals affected by unfortunate circumstances resulting from missing or disappeared family members or relatives. Within this dataset, the Data Management Unit (DMU) has meticulously identified and categorized 6,386 cases, distinguishing them as either Missing in Action (MIA) or duplicates/cases that do not fall within the purview of the OMP's mandate.

The operations of the Data Management Unit (DMU) primarily pertain to administrative functions, concentrating on the precise organization, categorization, and upkeep of the database. This entails the verification of accuracy and completeness for each entry, along with the continuous update of the status and progress of individual complaints as they traverse through the investigative process.

Through its unwavering commitment, the Data Management Unit (DMU) guarantees the database's status as a dependable and exhaustive repository of information for the Office of Missing Persons (OMP). This invaluable resource empowers the OMP to derive significant insights, discern patterns, and make well-informed decisions pertaining to missing persons cases. The meticulous administrative endeavors undertaken by the DMU serve as the cornerstone for the OMP's data-driven approach, enhancing the efficacy and efficiency of endeavors toward truth, justice, and reconciliation for the families of missing persons in Sri Lanka.

11. VICTIM & FAMILY SUPPORT UNIT

The Victims & Family Support Unit (VFS) constitutes an integral component of the Office of Missing Persons (OMP), functioning as the initial point of interaction for complainants seeking justice for their missing loved ones. Comprising five regional units and two gender-based units each, the VFS employs diverse psychosocial methodologies to create an environment that instills a sense of safety and comfort for complainants when providing their statements.

The VFS Officers, in their role overseeing the initial phase of the complaints process, collaborate with the Office of Missing Persons (OMP) to establish an enhanced mechanism for addressing complaints. Following a comprehensive qualification process, the VFS meticulously compiles and recommends appropriate courses of action and reparations for complainants. These recommendations are informed by the statements provided by complainants concerning the circumstances of disappearance (COA) and the cause of disappearance (COD).

A prominent challenge confronting the VFS pertains to the absence of a sufficient number of permanent staff, as the unit relies on approximately 200 contract workers in its cadre. This staffing insufficiency has resulted in challenges related to data entry and the undertaking of tasks beyond their designated purview. Consequently, the VFS has collaboratively engaged with data entry personnel to ensure the seamless processing of complaints.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the Victims & Family Support Unit (VFS) upholds its steadfast commitment to delivering quality service to complainants. Following the acknowledgment of a complaint, the VFS solicits the requisite documents to verify the mandate, relying on the information furnished by the applicant. The acknowledgment process serves dual purposes: assigning a unique complaint number and delineating the essential documents necessary to advance the complaint.

The Victims & Family Support Unit (VFS) has successfully concluded the acknowledgment process for all outstanding complaints carried forward from the year 2021 and those newly received in 2022.

The expeditious finalization of these complaints has created an opportunity for the Data Management Unit and the Legal Unit to commence their inquiry processes promptly. The VFS has dispatched 14,988 letters of acknowledgment to complainants who have submitted their complaints pertaining to missing and disappeared persons from 2021 onwards until the complaint

deadline in 2022, thus completing the examination of all complaints received within that timeframe.

In its entirety, the Victims & Family Support Unit (VFS) assumes a pivotal role in the overarching mission of the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) to deliver justice to the families of missing persons. Through unwavering dedication and commitment, the VFS diligently strives to ensure the efficient and equitable processing of all complaints. Throughout the calendar year, the VFS has consistently provided a vital service to the Sri Lankan community, furthering the objectives of the OMP in addressing the complexities associated with missing persons.

11.1 Missing Persons Data Form

The Missing Persons Data Form utilized by the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) for the purpose of collecting information pertaining to missing and disappeared individuals has undergone iterative refinement. Initiated through a pilot phase in 2018, subsequent to feedback received in 2019, an updated version of the missing person's data form was meticulously finalized and subsequently approved by the OMP Board in 2022. This approved form is presently in active use and is accessible in Sinhala, English, and Tamil languages.

Its development was guided by internationally recognized standards outlining the essential information required for documenting a missing person's report, tailored to the specific context and requirements of Sri Lanka. When considering the inquiry, Data Form is the essential tool of utilize preliminarily inquiry of missing persons. Data form will be collected via VFSO and Regional coordinator to the process of the OMP including protection, tracing, legal and data management and data management. Consequently, the simplified Missing Person Data Form, having received approval from the OMP Board, is available in Sinhala, Tamil, and English languages.

11.2 VFS and external collaborations

Furthermore, in tandem with its victim and family support responsibilities, the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) actively forges collaborations with diverse entities to acquire supplementary information pertinent to missing persons cases. The OMP proactively liaises with Divisional Secretariats, Grama Niladharis, District Secretariats, and local police, fostering cooperative relationships to glean valuable insights and data that enrich the comprehensive understanding of each case.

Acknowledging the significance of engaging the families of missing persons, the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) upholds consistent and meaningful communication with them. Through the establishment of a supportive and empathetic framework, the OMP guarantees that the voices of the families are not only heard but comprehensively understood in terms of their needs. This collaborative approach fosters an environment conducive to obtaining critical information from

the families, thereby fortifying the investigative process and augmenting the overall quality of data.

In order to optimize data management, the Victim and Family Supporting Unit of the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) collaborates closely with the Legal Unit. The Legal Unit assumes a pivotal role in crafting essential tools and guidelines for the panel members engaged in the investigative process. This involves the development of a comprehensive code of conduct, procedural guides, checklists, and case management techniques. These resources are instrumental in ensuring that investigative procedures are executed with transparency, systematic rigor, and accountability, all while adhering to legal and ethical standards.

Through the concerted efforts of the Victim and Family Supporting Unit, the Legal Unit, and collaborative engagements with pertinent authorities, the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) endeavors to establish a robust and dependable data management system. This system is designed to facilitate precise documentation, streamlined analysis, and informed decision-making, thereby advancing the OMP's overarching mission of truth-seeking, justice, and reconciliation for the families of missing persons in Sri Lanka.

12. FINANCE AND PROCUREMENT UNIT

The audited financial report for the fiscal year 2022 is appended herewith. Regrettably, owing to constraints on staff recruitment and pandemic-related restrictions, the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) was unable to achieve its financial targets in both programming and administrative tasks as originally envisaged. Consequently, Chairman [Name] initiated a dedicated focus on Finance and Procurement towards the end of the year to ensure the seamless functioning of the office (refer to Annexure I for the audited accounts).

13. HUMAN RESOURCES AND ADMINISTRATION UNIT

The Office on Missing Persons (OMP) dedicated substantial efforts and resources to the complete operationalization of its Head Office in Colombo and Regional Offices in Killinochchi, Mannar, Matara, Jaffna, and Batticaloa. The establishment of these Regional Offices has facilitated the OMP in effectively reaching families in districts affected by missing persons cases. The OMP remains steadfast in its commitment to treating affected families with the utmost sensitivity, dignity, and respect at all junctures.

The Office on Missing Persons (OMP) encountered substantial challenges in staff retention and recruitment for pivotal positions, largely attributed to restrictive rules and regulations that constrained the full utilization of allocated funds from the Budget. Moreover, the OMP observed a considerable impediment to recruitment processes, primarily stemming from the economic crisis that gripped the country in mid-2022. The resultant inability to secure individual experts in critical areas significantly hampered the functional capacity of the OMP for a substantial duration of the year.

OMP Board Members have played a pivotal role in the establishment and progression of the Office on Missing Persons (OMP), actively engaging on multiple fronts to execute indispensable tasks. Despite the challenges posed by the fuel crisis and economic downturn in the country, the Board convened regularly, holding 21 meetings throughout the year 2022. These meetings addressed a diverse array of topics, including strategic roadmap discussions, workforce restructuring, inquiry process enhancements, and capacity-building initiatives. The OMP Board Members diligently oversaw the organization's operations, collaborating with staff to fulfill functions in instances where unit heads were not appointed or units had yet to be established. Furthermore, the Commissioners actively participated in inquiries, conducted site visits, and engaged with families, civil society, and other state officials to enhance OMP services.

13.1 Staff Recruitment

Since its inception, the OMP has dedicated considerable time, energy, and resources to the recruitment of qualified staff possessing the requisite experience to occupy its various positions. Notably, the workforce comprises 255 individuals within the approved cadre, of which only 24 are members of the permanent cadre, with an additional 4 members on contract basis. Furthermore, the OMP augmented its team with the recruitment of a driver and a management assistant on a one-year contract basis.

Throughout the reporting period, the OMP did not introduce any new job titles, and there were no additions to legal and policy reforms within the system.

Chairman Mahesh Katulanda continued his tenure throughout the reporting year. However, it is noteworthy that the OMP Board experienced a change with the resignation of Mr. Shiraz Noordeen on April 28th, 2022. Consequently, the composition of the new board established for the year 2022 is as follows:

#	Full Name	Designation
1	Mr. Mahesh Katulanda (AAL)	Chairman
2	Mr. Wijekone Bandara Ganegala	Member of the Board
3	Mrs. Sithy Dane ArfaThassim	Member of the Board
4	Mr. Thambiaiah Yogarajah	Member of the Board

5	Mr. P M W Sampath Perera	Member of the Board
6	Mr. Madhava Jayawardhana	Member of the Board
7	Mr. Jayantha Wickramasinghe	Member of the Board

14. COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH UNIT

The OMP, since its establishment in 2018, has undertaken the responsibility of enhancing public awareness surrounding the causes, prevalence, and consequences of missing and disappeared persons. To fulfill this mandate, the OMP has formulated and implemented a comprehensive communications and outreach strategy. This strategy aims to disseminate information about the OMP's mission and operational endeavors, raise awareness about the far-reaching impacts of disappearances, underscore the importance of safeguarding the rights of the missing and disappeared, and debunk misconceptions associated with the OMP.

Through a combination of physical and digital media outreach materials, the OMP endeavors to ensure that information about its activities reaches the families of the missing and disappeared, pertinent stakeholders, and the broader public. The overarching goal is to foster understanding, empathy, and support for the OMP's crucial mission among diverse segments of society.

All operational activities were diligently executed and overseen by the respective units, adhering to the allocations stipulated in the Annual Action Plan. It is noteworthy that the Communication and Outreach Unit, although not yet established, did not impede the successful implementation of activities. The responsibility for managing press conferences, media appearances, and both written and verbal communications was efficiently shouldered by the Board members. Their active involvement ensured the effective dissemination of information in alignment with the OMP's objectives.

14.1.Engagement with the Media

A media conference was convened on the 30th of August to observe the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances. Regrettably, prevailing conditions within the country constrained the OMP from organizing additional public events during the reporting period.

14.2 Digital Presence

The OMP effectively maintained its presence on prominent social media platforms, including Twitter and Facebook, to facilitate meaningful interaction with the public through digital channels. As of December 31, 2022, the OMP garnered a notable following with 2088 followers on Twitter and 5000 followers on Facebook.

15. RIGHT TO INFORMATION

In accordance with the provisions stipulated under the Right to Information Act No. 12 of 2016, the OMP diligently upheld its commitment to facilitating access to information within its purview. In response to feedback of complaints made for OMP under the Right to Information Act, OMP prioritize transparency, accountability, and timely communication. OMP involves the following steps.

1. Acknowledgment:

Upon receiving a request or feedback under the Right to Information Act, we promptly acknowledge receipt to the requester, confirming the initiation of the process.

2. Processing:

OMP diligently processes the request, ensuring compliance with the provisions of the Act. Information Officer review the information requested, assess any exemptions or limitations, and determine the appropriate course of action.

3. Information Retrieval:

OMP retrieve the requested information from our records, databases, or relevant sources, ensuring accuracy and completeness.

4. Review and Approval:

Before release, the information undergoes review by Executive Director, OMP to ensure it aligns with legal requirements and organizational policies.

5. Response:

OMP provide a comprehensive response to the requester within the stipulated timeframe, either by furnishing the requested information or explaining any exemptions or limitations in accordance with the Act.

By adhering to these steps, OMP ensure a transparent and accountable approach to responding to feedback for the applicant under the Right to Information Act, thereby upholding the principles of reconciliation, cohesion and good governance. The following table encapsulates the OMP's handling of right to information requests throughout the year 2022.

No	Subject	Count
1	Number of information requests in 2022	08
2	Number of requests for which information has been provided fully	06
3	Number of requests for which information has been provided partially	00
4	Number of information requests refused or detained in terms of Sec 5 of the Act	02
5	Number of information requests denied, other than for reason contained in Section 5 of the Act (e.g.non, availability of information)	00
6	What is the average time (number of working days) taken to respond to an information request?	14 Days
7	How many information requests were received by post?	08
8	How many information requests were received by e-mail?	00
9	How many information requests were received by any other means other than by post or e-mail.	00

16. THE CHALLENGES IN 2022

The OMP encountered challenges pertaining to its operational policies, particularly in relation to the amendments introduced to Section 11(a) of Act No. 14 of 2016 by Amendment No. 09 of 2017. This amendment has created difficulties for the OMP to function independently, specifically with regards to its capacity to enter into agreements deemed necessary to fulfill the OMP's mandate, whether with individuals or organizations.

Moreover, the OMP confronts substantial challenges attributed to its constrained human resources. Operating as an autonomous institution, the OMP encountered various difficulties stemming from the frequent turnover of leadership owing to the resignation of OMP members. The predominant challenge revolved around the recruitment of personnel within the approved cadre. In the final quarter of the year, under the guidance of the new Chairman, the OMP engaged in fruitful dialogues with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and other relevant ministries, authorities, and stakeholders to address and surmount this challenge.

17. APPRECIATION

The Office on Missing Persons (OMP) extends its sincere gratitude to all collaborative partners who have played a pivotal role in facilitating the achievements of our goals in the year 2022. The OMP

expresses appreciation for the unwavering cooperation received from the Government, the Minister, Registrar General's Office, Attorney General's Office, all District Secretariats, and the Grama Niladhari. Grateful acknowledgment is also extended to the Diplomatic Community and Development Partners, including the UN, EU, and ICRC, for their steadfast support in fulfilling the OMP mandate. The Office expresses deep gratitude to the Association of the Families and Religious Leaders for their essential collaboration in 2022, recognizing that their involvement has been instrumental in the OMP's progress. The commendable encouragement provided by the Media, Journalists, and Academia is acknowledged with thanks. Lastly, the OMP appreciates the tireless efforts of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) staff, the OMP team, volunteers, and OMP Board Members, whose collective dedication has contributed to making the year 2022 a year of notable success.