
Remembering Maheswary Velautham, Victim of Tiger terror

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By M. K. P. Chandralal - Attorney at law The first death anniversary of Miss. Maheswary Velautham fell yesterday – 13 May 2009. Miss Maheswary was born in Karaveddy, Jaffna on 17th July 1953. She entered the Faculty of Law, University of Colombo in 1972. While reading for her law degree, she developed a desire for social work. She was a strong believer of democracy and Human Rights.

After her graduation from the Law Faculty, she started her career as a lawyer under TULF President, M Sivasithamparam. After a brief career at Hulfsdorf, she went to Tamil Nadu on an invitation of a well known Human Rights lawyer Mr. K. Kandasamy to run a Human Rights Centre in Madurai, which worked for Sri Lankan Refugees in India. She established contacts with Indian media and human rights organizations and helped many Tamils stranded in Tamil Nadu without a place for refuge or money for meals. After the Indo Lanka Peace Accord, she returned to Sri Lanka and established a Human Rights Non-Government Organization, by the name of Forum for Human Dignity (FHD) in the year 1997. Within a few years, the FHD grew in popularity and recognition and was well recognized among the Human Rights Activists the world over. With an undaunted spirit, Maheswary and her team worked tirelessly to uphold the Human Rights situation in Sri Lanka. At the time the FHD started work, thousands of Tamil youths were arrested on mere suspicion under National Security laws. They were sometimes subjected to torture by the police while in detention. Several hundreds of youths were arbitrarily detained without prosecution. FHD took up the cases of arbitrary arrests and harassments with the Anti Harassment Committee established by the then President of Sri Lanka and obtained redress for some of the victims. FHD provided free legal assistance for the political detainees in Courts of law and filed Fundamental Rights Applications for the torture victims in the Supreme Court. Apart from the legal assistances for political prisoners, FHD helped the arrested Indian and Sri Lankan fishermen who were languishing in jails in respective countries for illegal entry to the each other's territorial waters. FHD took up the cases of stranded Foreign Nationals in Sri Lanka and referred them to the UNHCR for assistance. She was worried over the violence carried out by the LTTE in the name of Tamil struggle at a time when many Tamil intellectuals kept dead silent on LTTE atrocities. She openly criticized the killing of unarmed civilians and democratically elected political leaders. She firmly believed that violence will not bring any solution to the problems of Tamil speaking people. She was determined to strengthen the alternate Tamil leadership to restore democracy and pluralism within the Tamil society. She worked hand in hand with Douglas Devananda to improve the living conditions of the Tamil people. When her mother was critically ill, she visited her home town Karaveddy, to see her mother and to be with her. I met her at her office, prior to her departure to Jaffna to see her ailing mother. Many of us requested her to reconsider her decision to go to Jaffna as she already had life threats. But she was very firm in her decision and said no matter what would happen to her if she could help her mother to survive by a few more days. She left for Jaffna with her brothers and sisters who had come from Britain to see their beloved mother. I was told that she spent most of her time by the bedside of her sick mother. On that fateful day, 13th of May 2008 her killers approached her while she was with her mother and shot her in the presence of all her family members. It was another political killing for the so called liberators of Tamil people, but the vacuum created by her untimely death would remain forever. She was a symbol of love and care for the needy people belonging to all ethnic groups in our country. She stood for them whole heartedly without expecting anything in return. At a time we are commemorating her first death anniversary; her killers are getting the final blow from the brave solders. It is regretted that she is not with us today to witness the dawn of a new era to our motherland, free from hatred and terrorism where all Sri Lankans could live together as one family. - Asian Tribune - Courtesy: asiantribune.com