

INTERNATIONAL
TRUTH
AND JUSTICE
PROJECT

Pathfinder for Norwegian Archive – Briefing Note

25 February 2026

W ITJPSL.COM
E ITJPSL@GMAIL.COM

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:
YASMIN SOOKA

On 27 January 2026, Norwegian diplomat and former politician Erik Solheim (also the former Norwegian Special Envoy to the Sri Lanka peace process) inaugurated a repository of documents related to the ceasefire negotiations during the Sri Lanka civil war.¹

The repository was the initiative of a Sri Lankan organisation, the Pathfinder Foundation.² Though purportedly an independent, non-partisan research and advocacy think tank, the Pathfinder Foundation currently hosts a retired Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) official implicated in serious human rights violations as a “Distinguished Fellow”.³

This official, Jayanath Colombage, held senior operational command positions in the SLN during the period of the abduction, unlawful detention, torture, and enforced disappearance of 11 civilians (including a child) in Colombo between August 2008 and February 2009, allegedly by a special intelligence unit of the SLN. Commonly referred to as the *Trincomalee 11*, this case has been investigated by the Sri Lankan police and noted by the UN as an emblematic case.⁴

¹ *Preserving History: Pathfinder Foundation Launches Sri Lanka’s First Dedicated Peace Process Repository with Erik Solheim*, HARI DESHAYA, 27 January 2026, <https://harideshaya.lk/news-2/2820/>.

² *Id.*

³ Pathfinder Foundation, About us, <https://pathfinderfoundation.org/about-us>.

⁴ Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 1 October 2015, 30/1. Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka, A/HRC/RES/30/1, 14 October 2015, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g15/236/38/pdf/g1523638.pdf> and Report of the OHCHR, Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka, A/HRC/40/23, 8 February 2019, paras. 39 and 47, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g19/029/25/pdf/g1902925.pdf>.

Based on police investigative reports submitted to the Colombo Fort Magistrate Court, the eleven victims had been illegally detained first in a part of the naval headquarters in Colombo named “Pittu Bambuwa” (August 2008 - March 2009) and then in the Trincomalee naval dockyard’s underground torture site (known as the “Gun Site” *or* “Gun Side”) (March - May 2009).⁵ Several navy officers saw or were aware of the victims in custody, either in the SLN headquarters in Colombo or at the Gun Site in Trincomalee.⁶ Abducted under the pretext of LTTE connections and counterterrorism, none of the victims have been found by the police to be linked to the LTTE or terrorism.⁷

The police further established that both “Pittu Bambuwa” and Gun Site were illegal detention sites that had not been gazetted at the time, and those held there were never produced before the police or in court.⁸ The 11 victims’ bodies were never recovered but investigators believe that they may have been killed sometime in 2009.⁹

The police identified a group of navy officers responsible for these abductions and detentions,¹⁰ and established that they operated under navy intelligence officer R.P.S. Ranasinghe.¹¹ Another navy officer, R.C. Wijegunaratne, was separately charged with allegedly attempting to abduct a material witness who testified that Wijegunaratne had aided and abetted an absconding suspect in the disappearance case, hiding him in naval headquarters from the police.

Systematic and Widespread Violations beyond the Trincomalee 11 Case

Gun Site held more than the 11 victims in the *Trincomalee 11* case. The United Nations Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearance (WGEID) visited Gun Site in November 2015 and noted that systematic torture had taken place in the underground cells in Trincomalee.¹² The WGEID concluded that, although the Sri Lankan police investigation was

⁵ Police B Reports dated 5 January 2011, 20 April 2015, 5 January 2017, and 13 March 2017; Statement by Inspector of Police (IP) Ranjith Munasinghe to the court on 5 January 2011; Statements by IP Nishantha de Silva to the court on 20 April 2015, 27 September 2016, 5 January 2017, and 14 August 2018.

⁶ The officers are (1) Wijekoon Mudiyanseelage Chandrakumar (saw the five boys in custody at SLN HQ in Colombo); (2) Petty officer Susantha (XC 30543) (saw the five boys handcuffed to bed stands); (3) Naval rating Ranhavadi Durayalage Priyankara (VA 59652) (identified victims from photos); (4) Chief Petty Officer Attanayaka Mudiyanseelage Ashoka Mahesh Kumara (ED 26213) (aware of the detention of the five victims); (5) Commodore Shemal Perera (confirmed the five victims were in Trincomalee); and (6) Naval rating Wimalaweera Wickramasuriya (XP 20844) (saw Rajeev and two other victims apart from the five youths). Statements by IP Nishantha de Silva to the court on 27 September 2016 and 14 August 2018; and Police B Reports dated 9 June 2009, 13 July 2016, 13 March 2017, and 13 July 2017.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Statement by IP Nishantha de Silva to the court on 13 January 2016.

⁹ Statements by IP Nishantha de Silva to the court on 22 April 2017, 24 August 2017, and 14 August 2018.

¹⁰ Statements by IP Nishantha de Silva to the court on 20 April 2015, 12 November 2015, 27 September 2016, respectively, and 20 June 2017, and Police B Report 13 March 2017. The officers identified were Aulthgedera Upul Bandara, Lt. Cmdr. Hettiarachchi, Udayakumarage Lakshman Udayakumara, Chandrakumara, Thammita Ihalagedara Dharmadasa, Kumara Kottegoda, Chandrakumara, Rajapaksa Pathirana Kithsiri, and Somadasa Dassanayake.

¹¹ Statement by IP Nishantha de Silva to the court on 27 September 2016. In-camera admissions to court by Kumara Kottegoda and Somadasa Dassanayake on 20 February 2019.

¹² Report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances on its mission to Sri Lanka, 8 July 2016, A/HRC/33/51/Add.2, para. 49.

limited to the enforced disappearance of 11 individuals, it was “very clear that many more people were detained” there.¹³ The WGEID observed that the secret detention site had been used for many years to detain and torture many more than 11 people.¹⁴ The WGEID further reported seeing a date of 25 July 2010 graffitied on a cell wall, which they believed indicated the site was still in use on that date.¹⁵

Other navy officers interviewed by the police in the course of their investigation also saw or were aware of the existence of detainees at the SLN Colombo HQ and/or Trincomalee base in general.¹⁶

Furthermore, the ITJP has gathered testimony from Tamil survivors abroad as well as evidence provided by Sinhalese insiders (including naval officials and eyewitnesses) covering a range of arbitrary detention, torture, and enforced disappearances between 2008 and 2012 in Colombo or Trincomalee.¹⁷ A former Navy officer also noted that the site was used by Navy intelligence as a detention and torture site from around 2005/2006 and increasingly from 2007.¹⁸ Several other ITJP witnesses also confirmed that the site was operational from 2008 to 2012, possibly even before 2008.¹⁹ These valuable sources has provided information that not only corroborated the Sri Lankan police investigation into the *Trincomalee 11* but also further illustrates the widespread and systematic nature of the criminal conduct among all ranks of the SLN.

Based on ex-SLN witnesses and victim testimony collected by the ITJP, naval intelligence used informers to identify captured LTTE members and tortured them to gather intelligence and turn them into informers themselves.²⁰ Naval intelligence also allegedly worked closely with the Karuna group from the East.²¹ Moreover, according to naval insiders, naval intelligence financed its vast network of informants through criminal activity, including the proceeds of abductions for ransoms, which also took place in the *Trincomalee 11* case.²² These ITJP witness accounts are further corroborated by other NGO reports from inside and

¹³ Report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances on its mission to Sri Lanka, 8 July 2016, A/HRC/33/51/Add.2, para. 49.

¹⁴ Report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances on its mission to Sri Lanka, 8 July 2016, A/HRC/33/51/Add.2, para. 49.

¹⁵ Amantha Perera, *UN Discovery of Secret Detention Centre Revives Nightmares*, IPS NEWS, 22 December 2015, <https://reliefweb.int/report/sri-lanka/un-discovery-secret-detention-centre-revives-nightmares>.

¹⁶ These include: (1) Petty Officer Liyanage Upul Chaminda (XP 20746) (saw detainees in Colombo and was informed that they were held under ADC Sampath Munasinghe and Lt. Cmdr. Hettiarachchi’s orders; also aware of detainees at Gun Site); (2) Sailor BM Wijayakantha, alias Podi Malli (VAS 68653) (saw many detainees at Gun Site); and (3) Able Seaman Havan Kumbura Gedara Saman Kumara Abayakoon (XS 45655) (saw many detainees at Gun Site). Statements by IP Nishantha de Silva to the court on 26 November 2017 and 14 August 2018; Statement by IP Ranjith Munasinghe to the court on 26 February 2014; Police B Report dated 19 February 2015; and W250.

¹⁷ The ITJP gathered further evidence of similar abuses in a Navy-run detention facility in Welisara as late as 2014.

¹⁸ W250.

¹⁹ W 65 and W66.

²⁰ W65, W66, W182, and W223. See also Statement by IP Nishantha de Silva to the court on 24 August 2017.

²¹ See P. K. Balachandran, *Canada Sanctions Two Former Sri Lankan Presidents For Wartime Rights Violations - Analysis*, EURASIA REVIEW, 10 January 2023, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/10012023-canada-sanctions-two-former-sri-lankan-presidents-for-wartime-rights-violations-analysis/>.

²² W308.

outside Sri Lanka.²³ Additionally, like several of the *Trincomalee 11* victims, civilians were also abducted, detained, and tortured.²⁴ Drawing on accounts from former detainees and SLN personnel, the ITJP estimates that a minimum of 75-100 individuals were held at Gun Site, though the precise total has yet to be established.²⁵

More information could be found in the 2019 report by the ITJP on the case.²⁶

Jayanath Colombage's Role in the Violations

According to the SLN's official reports to Parliament, Colombage was the Director General of Operations from 27 August 2007 to 7 January 2008 and from 16 May to 7 August 2009,²⁷ during which time some of the 11 disappearance victims were still held at Gun Site.²⁸ The Director General of Operations oversaw naval intelligence officers who directly carried out the human rights violations elaborated above. The abovementioned R.C. Wijegunaratne was Colombage's immediate subordinate. There is no evidence that the chain of command had broken down to the point where he could not exercise effective control over his troops or could not stay up-to-date of their activities.

Colombage was subsequently the Commander of the Eastern Naval Area, under which the Trincomalee naval dockyard falls, from January 2010 to September 2012, during which time Gun Site continued to operate for scores of LTTE suspects and civilians alike.²⁹ During the time he was the Eastern Commander, the above naval intelligence officer R.P.S. Ranasinghe—identified by the police as the person under whom the direct perpetrators in the *Trincomalee 11* operated—served directly under Colombage. The two had a very close relationship, with

²³ Amnesty International, *Sri Lanka: Locked away: Sri Lanka's security detainees*, 13 March 2012, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa37/003/2012/en/>, and The Social Architects, *Whose democracy is it anyway?*, GROUNDVIEWS, 1 March 2015, <https://groundviews.org/2015/03/01/whose-democracy-is-it-anyway/>.

²⁴ W66; See also Statement by Sub-Inspector Upali to the court on 9 June 2009; Statement by IP Nishantha de Silva to the court on 14 August 2018; Police B Reports dated 9 June 2009, 13 July 2016 and 13 July 2017; and Statement by KC Welagedara to the court on 25 March 2009.

²⁵ W65, W66, and W113.

²⁶ ITJP, *The Sri Lankan Navy: A Collective Blind Eye*, October 2019, https://itjpsl.com/assets/press/ITJP_navy_reportfinal-2-SINGLES.pdf.

²⁷ Sri Lanka Navy Reports 2007 (p. 3), 2008 (p. 3), and 2009 (p. 3).

²⁸ In May 2009, Rajeev Naganathan's parents visit the Fisheries and Aquatics Resources Minister, Wimal Felix Perera, who invites his neighbour Commodore Shemal Perera to help. A few days later Shemal Perera confirms the boys are in Trincomalee. Also in May 2009, someone named Heshan called Rajeev Naganathan's father to complain that people knew he facilitated calls and that he was in trouble as a result. In June 2009, Minister Felix Perera writes to the Navy Commander Wasantha Karannagoda following confirmation the boys were being held in Trincomalee. No response or action was taken as a result. Police B report dated 13 March 2017 and Nirmala Kannangara, *Secret Navy Team Behind White Van Ransom Abductions*, THE SUNDAY LEADER, 19 March 2017, original article no longer available online but is reproduced at <https://sangam.org/case-involving-navy-abductions-takes-dramatic-turn/>.

²⁹ While Colombage was in charge of the Eastern Naval Area, the police investigation in the *Trincomalee 11* case revealed that Shantha Samaraweera (also written as Samarawickrama) of Kegalle, was also kept in Gun Site, under the custody of R.P.S. Ranasinghe and his Special Intelligence Unit officers. Shantha was a suspect in a criminal case who fled from police custody in hospital in July 2010 and has been missing since. Similarly, the Trincomalee 11 police investigation revealed that victim Prageeth Nisansala Vithanarachchi, missing since 31 October 2010, was also held at Gun Site under the custody of R.P.S. Ranasinghe and his Special Intelligence Unit officers. See Police B Report dated 22 May 2015; Statement by IP Illangasinghe on 22 May 2015; and Statement by IP Nishantha Silva on 8 July 2015.

Ranasinghe later serving as Colombage's Personal Security Officer when Colombage became the Navy Commander in September 2012.

I
T
J
P

Given his senior commanding positions, his close relationships with subordinates directly involved in the human rights violations, as well as the existence of intact and functioning chain of command, there are reasonable grounds to believe that Colombage knew or at a minimum had reason to know of information clearly indicating that officers under his command and control were committing the human rights violations, and consciously disregarded such information, failing to act to prevent these violations of human rights and to punish his subordinates. Colombage is therefore responsible for the violations under the theory of command responsibility.

Importantly, a number of SLN officials connected to this case have been sanctioned by Canada, the UK, and the U.S.³⁰

[The Pathfinder Foundation's Archive](#)

Given the Pathfinder Foundation's association with Colombage, an individual implicated in serious human rights violations as described above, the foundation's establishment of an archive for documents related to the peace process during Sri Lanka's civil war raises grave legal, ethical, and normative concerns.

Under international law, victims and their families have an inalienable right to know the truth about gross violations of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law. This right is affirmed in the UN Updated Principles for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights through Action to Combat Impunity (Joinet/Orentlicher Principles), which recognize both the right of victims and the duty of institutions to preserve archives relating to violations in ways that ensure their integrity, independence, and accessibility.³¹

The preservation of archives in institutions associated with individuals credibly implicated in violations risks contributing to denial and may undermine the evidentiary integrity of materials that could otherwise serve accountability processes, including future judicial proceedings. Entrusting archival custody to such institutions

³⁰ See Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, The Rt Hon David Lammy MP and Catherine West MP, *UK sanctions for human rights violations and abuses during the Sri Lankan civil war*, 24 March 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-sanctions-for-human-rights-violations-and-abuses-during-the-sri-lankan-civil-war>; P. K. Balachandran, *Canada Sanctions Two Former Sri Lankan Presidents For Wartime Rights Violations - Analysis*, EURASIA REVIEW, 10 January 2023, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/10012023-canada-sanctions-two-former-sri-lankan-presidents-for-wartime-rights-violations-analysis/>; U.S. Department of State, Report to Congress on Anti-Kleptocracy and Human Rights Visa Restrictions: Public Listing, Fiscal Year 2022, <https://www.state.gov/reports/report-to-congress-on-anti-kleptocracy-and-human-rights-visa-restrictions-public-listing/public-listing-fiscal-year-2022/>; and U.S. Department of State, Report to Congress on Anti-Kleptocracy and Human Rights Visa Restrictions: Public Listing, Fiscal Year 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/report-to-congress-on-anti-kleptocracy-and-human-rights-visa-restrictions-public-listing/public-listing-fiscal-year-2023/>. NB: Only two navy officers were publicly sanctioned, but ITJP has learned from a highly credible insider source that all five navy officers were sanctioned.

³¹ UN Commission on Human Rights, Updated Set of Principles to Combat Impunity (Joinet/Orentlicher Principles) (2005), Principle 2: Right to know, E/CN.4/2005/102/Add.1, <https://undocs.org/E/CN.4/2005/102/Add.1>.

risks compromising the authenticity, independence, and credibility of the historical record and may perpetuate harm to victims and survivors. The reported lack of accessibility of this digital archive to millions of Tamils, including victims' families and scholars in the diaspora, raises further concerns.

Archives relating to armed conflict, peace processes, and gross violations are not neutral repositories. They are central instruments in realizing victims' rights to truth, justice, and reparation. International standards—including guidance from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights³² and the Minnesota Protocol³³—require that such archives be safeguarded by institutions that are independent, impartial, and free from conflicts of interest, and protected against manipulation, concealment, or political instrumentalization. International best practice further requires that archives relating to peace processes and violations be accessible in a transparent, non-discriminatory, and victim-centred manner, subject only to narrowly defined and legitimate restrictions.

The preservation of archives in institutions associated with individuals credibly implicated in violations risks contributing to denial and may undermine the evidentiary integrity of materials that could otherwise serve accountability processes, including future judicial proceedings. It also risks legitimizing structures of impunity and perpetuating the marginalization and harm experienced by victims and survivors.

ends

³² OHCHR Rule-of-Law Tools for Post-Conflict States: Archives (2015)
https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/Archives_EN.pdf.

³³ Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death (2016), paras. 65-66:
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/publications/policy-and-methodological-publications/minnesota-protocol-investigation-potentially>.

INTERNATIONAL
TRUTH
AND JUSTICE
PROJECT