

## Sri Lankan govt. launches Office of Missing Persons

Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena.APEranga Jayawardena

Sri Lanka has appointed commissioners to a special panel tasked with investigating war-era disappearances. The Office of Missing Persons was officially launched on Wednesday by President Maithripala Sirisena.

The country's Parliament agreed two years ago to the first steps toward reconciling its war-era past — tracing about 20,000 people who went missing during 37 years of fighting.

### Stalled process

But the process stalled amid resistance from the Army and Mr. Sirisena's own coalition, which has been plagued by infighting in recent times. "The OMP is tasked with determining the status of all missing persons in Sri Lanka and is the first pillar of the transitional justice mechanisms," the government said in a statement.

The panel has the power to recommend compensation and clear the way for next of kin to take legal action against those responsible for the disappearance of their loved ones. The government appointed seven commissioners to the panel, which will be headed by senior lawyer Saliya Peiris.

It gave no explanation for the two-year delay in appointing commissioners but the announcement comes ahead of a UN Human Rights Council session in Geneva where Sri Lanka's rights record is to be discussed.

The council has in the past described Sri Lanka's efforts at transitional justice as at a "virtual standstill" nearly a decade after the end of a war which claimed over 1,00,000 lives.

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