

## **USTPAC Welcomes UN Human Rights Chief's Challenge to Sri Lanka: Prosecute Perpetrators or International Community has 'Duty' to Establish Own Inquiry**

*UN High Commissioner for Human Rights reports on Sri Lanka's failure to address past and ongoing rights violations. The report, which follows two UN Human Rights Council resolutions on Sri Lanka and a recent country visit by the High Commissioner, raises serious allegations of entrenched impunity, continued violations, and flagrant disregard for democracy and the rule of law in the island nation.*

**GENEVA, September 26, 2013:** United States Tamil Political Action Council (**USTPAC**) thanks UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Navi Pillay and her team for their recent visit to Sri Lanka and the [oral report](#) provided on Wednesday to the 24<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC).

Commissioner Pillay's report to the Council, criticizes the heavy military presence in the North, and notes with concern ongoing sexual harassment of vulnerable groups, and the compulsory acquisition of private land. She encourages the Sri Lankan government to "use the time between now and March 2014 to engage in a credible national process with tangible results, including the successful prosecution of individual perpetrators, in the absence of which [the Commissioner] believes the international community will have a duty to establish its own inquiry mechanisms."

**USTPAC** welcomes Commissioner Pillay's firm stance on justice and accountability for both sides. "The High Commissioner's report puts the Sri Lankan government on notice: act now, or face a jury of concerned actors in the international community in March," said Tasha Manoranjan, USTPAC delegate attending the current HRC session in Geneva. "While we regret additional delay in establishing an international investigation into the war crimes that occurred at the end of the civil war, we urge the Commissioner and the UNHRC to expand its mandate to include the charge of genocide. The insidious intention behind the Sri Lankan government's attacks against Tamil civilians in 2009 – and today – must not be ignored."

Commissioner Pillay's report follows her recent visit to Sri Lanka, the longest official visit undertaken by the Commissioner. In her [statement](#) in Colombo on August 31, 2013, she stated that in Sri Lanka, although the "war may have ended, democracy had been undermined and the rule of law eroded".

While the Commissioner congratulated the Government on its reconstruction efforts, she also maintained that, "physical reconstruction alone will not bring reconciliation, dignity, or lasting peace. Clearly, a more holistic approach is needed". She added her deep concern that "Sri Lanka, despite the opportunity provided by the end of the war to construct a new vibrant, all-embracing state, is showing signs of heading in an increasingly authoritarian direction."

Commissioner Pillay further cautioned the Sri Lankan government that if the factors impeding a

return to normalcy are not remedied immediately, they might fuel the fire of future dissonance.

While welcoming the Northern Provincial Council elections, she noted that this should usher in a new stage in the devolution of power. "The Tamil people have clearly demanded dignity and self-rule, and this plea must not fall on deaf ears in the international community," said Manoranjan. Ms. Ananthi Sasitharan, the only female candidate for the NPC elections and one who met Commissioner Pillay during her visit to Sri Lanka, was [attacked and narrowly escaped](#) with her life just one day before the election. "Despite election violence and fraud, the Tamil people voted for the leading Tamil political party in a [landslide victory](#)," Ms. Manoranjan stated.

In the context of transparent Tamil aspirations on the ground, **USTPAC** wishes to thank the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and that of the UNHRC member states and the international community for their continued and persistent engagement in Sri Lanka. Setting up of a credible international inquiry to investigate Sri Lanka's war crimes, crimes against humanity and charge of genocide is the need of the hour.

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