

USTPAC Welcomes the Oral Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on Sri Lanka

WASHINGTON, Sept. 24, 2014: The US Tamil Political Action Council (USTPAC) welcomes the 22 September 2014 [report](#) of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on Promoting Reconciliation, Accountability and Human Rights in Sri Lanka. USTPAC commends the UN High Commissioner for a robust assessment of the challenges to justice, accountability, and human rights in Sri Lanka, and strongly supports his recommendations.

We join the High Commissioner in calling on the Government of Sri Lanka to “address (the) many root causes and structural issues that contributed to the conflict, and lay the basis for longer-term reconciliation” while also urging “the Government to end the climate of intimidation, threat and harassment against civil society actors advocating for justice and human rights, as well as incitement to hatred and violence against the country’s Muslim and Christian minorities, which will only undermine the prospects for peace and reconciliation.”

USTPAC remains committed to seeking justice for the [grave crimes](#) against humanity that took place during the Sri Lankan conflict and for ending the current abuses that remain to this day. We support the High Commissioner’s strong commitment to justice and accountability, and support all elements of the report fully.

In particular, USTPAC highlights the following key assessments and comments:

- The High Commissioner’s regrets concerning the Government of Sri Lanka’s rejection of Resolution 25/1 and its non-cooperation with the OHCHR investigation;
- The High Commissioner’s acknowledgment of the resolutions passed by the Northern Provincial Council in support of Resolution 25/1 and the OHCHR investigation;
- Sri Lanka’s obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law to conduct credible, independent investigations into past abuses;
- The nine outstanding requests to visit Sri Lanka by UN special rapporteurs and experts;
- The ongoing campaign of threats, harassment, intimidation, and reprisals against civil society groups, human rights defenders and victims’ organizations, including those who might engage with the international inquiry;
- Increased restrictions on the activities of non-governmental organizations, which “seems calculated to make the international investigation mandated by the Human Rights Council even more challenging and difficult”;

- The proscription of Tamil organizations and individuals which are mainstream Tamil diaspora groups that have been engaged with the Human Rights Council and other international human rights mechanisms. Such measures will have “far-reaching and negative impacts on freedom of expression and association and efforts for reconciliation in the country”;
- The draft bill requiring public officials to be present when witnesses testify from remote locations, how this bill severely constrains the possibilities for evidence to be taken by video-link from abroad;
- The need for a credible and transparent judicial process to be undertaken to investigate the new mass grave sites that have been discovered, on which exhumations and investigation have been very slow;
- The activities of the military to occupy and compulsorily acquire private land in the north, as well as involuntary relocation projects that have been “criticized for lacking transparency, public consultation and inadequately addressing disruption to livelihoods”; and
- The grave concern for the escalation in religious extremism and increasing attacks against Muslim and Christian minorities, and lack of prosecutions of those responsible.

In the spirit of the High Commissioner’s report, USTPAC calls upon the US administration and the international community to exert pressure on President Rajapaksa and his Administration to not only cooperate with the High Commissioner’s investigation but also take tangible and demonstrable steps toward ending the climate of abuse and impunity that exists today.

As President Rajapaksa addresses the UN General Assembly on 24 September, the international community will be watching to measure his commitment to accountability and justice, and we join the High Commissioner in appealing to the Sri Lankan authorities “to cooperate fully with the (OHCHR) investigation, as well as with the relevant Special Procedures mandate holders, in the long-term interests of all Sri Lankans.”

We share the High Commissioner’s belief that “a more fundamental and far-reaching accountability process in Sri Lanka, addressing both past and ongoing violations, is absolutely necessary for Sri Lankans to come to terms with their past, end impunity, achieve reconciliation between communities and strengthen the rule of law.”

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