

55th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council

Item 2: General Debate on the Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General

Oral statement delivered by Ahmed Adam

On behalf of Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) and Amnesty International

4 March 2024

Thank you, Mr. Vice President,

We thank the High Commissioner for the wide ranging global update and the update on Sri Lanka.

Since the High Commissioner's report on Sri Lanka to the Council in September, the situation in the country has further deteriorated.

In the context of continuing harassment, surveillance, and arbitrary detention of human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers and civil society, new laws including the Online Safety Act, and proposals for Anti-Terrorism, NGO Supervision and Registration, and Electronic Media Broadcasting Authority laws giving broad powers to law enforcement and security authorities, evoke fears of past violations and add a serious chilling effect on legitimate exercises of civil and political rights.

In the North and the East of the country, families of victims as well as those involved in commemoration and memorialisation of victims of gross violations including extrajudicial executions and enforced disappearances have been subjected to harassment, surveillance and arbitrary detention. Continuing militarisation and land grabbing with involvement of the military in the region undermine security of local communities and prospects for reconciliation.

The need for accountability for war time atrocities remains paramount. Pervasive impunity for wartime atrocities and continuing violations contributed to the governance failure that resulted in large scale corruption and economic crimes which in turn led to nationwide protests two years ago.

Without concrete confidence building measures, open, safe and enabling environment for civil society as well as genuine consultation with survivors, victims and their families, the proposed Truth and Reconciliation Commission awaits the same fate of all previous commissions that failed to provide any semblance of justice and accountability. Under the current circumstance, this commission will not be perceived as anything other than another attempt to deceive the Council and international community to ensure impunity and avoid scrutiny.

In the absence of any prospect of accountability through domestic mechanisms and ongoing violations, it is imperative that Council during its September session, at minimum, extends and strengthens the Sri Lanka Accountability Project and continues enhanced scrutiny and reporting on the situation by the High Commissioner.

Thank you.