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Sri Lanka: UN visit underscores disturbing human rights reality

Sri Lankan leaders must address the persistent climate of fear in the country, Amnesty International said as the UN human rights chief Navi Pillay concluded her visit to the island.

Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, made her first official visit to Sri Lanka from 25-31 August. It comes just before the UN and Commonwealth review the country's human rights situation in September

At her [concluding press conference](#) today, Pillay stressed that many who met or wanted to meet her during the visit had been threatened by security forces, and that critical voices in Sri Lanka are "quite often attacked or even permanently silenced".

"Navi Pillay's take on the human rights situation during her visit very much [echoes our own findings](#). Being critical of government policy in Sri Lanka is highly risky, and the extent to which people are being harassed into silence is shocking", said Polly Truscott Amnesty International's Deputy Asia Pacific Director.

"We're glad that Navi Pillay got a chance to meet some victims and families of the disappeared. But the reprisals against those she met, doesn't bode well for the Commonwealth Summit set for November in Colombo. The government must stop its attacks on Sri Lankan civil society".

"The Sri Lankan conflict may have ended in 2009, but the level of human rights violations in the country remains critically high. The Sri Lankan government still shows no real will to account for past crimes, combined with new attacks on those calling for accountability."

Pillay today insisted that "unless there is a credible national process, calls for an international inquiry are likely to continue" into the events of the armed conflict

"There is still every need for the UN to set up an independent international investigation into crimes under international law in Sri Lanka, as Pillay has called for in the past."

"The UN and Commonwealth must respond effectively to these latest concerns raised by Pillay" said Truscott

Notes to Editors:

The UN Human Rights Council in its resolution 22/1 of March 2013 asked the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay to provide an update on the situation in Sri Lanka at its September session.

The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, responsible for addressing all instances of serious or persistent violations of Commonwealth values, is expected to discuss the situation in Sri Lanka at its meeting in September.