

Media Advisory

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Sri Lanka: A human rights agenda for the new Prime Minister

As Sri Lanka's new parliament prepares for its first sitting, Amnesty International today wrote to recently-elected Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe about human rights concerns in the country.

The organization said that it hoped that human rights commitments outlined in the political manifesto of the new ruling party, the United National Party (UNP), would become reality. Those commitments include reinforcing the fundamental rights of the people, safeguarding women's rights, the appointment of an independent commission to solve the problems of the internally displaced, de-politicising the armed forces, and addressing issues of freedom of movement and access to food and medicine for people living in the conflict areas.

"One of the key issues for the new government is impunity. In order to prevent human rights violations and secure the confidence of the people, security forces must be held to account for the abuses they commit. The Prime Minister must clarify the government's policy on this when he addresses parliament," Amnesty International said.

In the past, investigations have proceeded very slowly, and in relation to some violations such as torture, including rape, no member of the security forces has ever been convicted. Amnesty International urged the Prime Minister to issue a clear and unequivocal declaration that human rights violations will never be tolerated and that those responsible will be held to account. An investigative body fully independent of the police is needed to ensure that this happens.

Over the years, many expert bodies, including the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) and three Presidential commissions of inquiry, have made recommendations for the prevention of grave human rights violations such as

"disappearances". The new government should revisit these recommendations and take action to implement them. In particular, the government should prioritise a review of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA).

Planned negotiations with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) could also bring about an improved human rights situation in the country. Any agreements reached should guarantee the security of Sri Lankan people and establish a system of justice and equality before the law.

Amnesty International also asked for assurances that executions will not be resumed, as was the practice during 17 years of UNP government.

The organization said that it hoped to continue its substantive dialogue about human rights with the new administration and looked forward to receiving a response to the letter.

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