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Sri Lanka: Human Rights Council vote a step in the right direction

The UN Human Rights Council resolution calling on Sri Lanka to end longstanding impunity for human rights abuses is a vital step forward for the country and for international justice, Amnesty International said.

The resolution was adopted today in Geneva, with 24 nations voting in favour, 15 against, and 8 abstaining.

“This is a positive step forward for Sri Lankans, and an opportunity to end the longstanding impunity for human rights violations that have marked the country for decades,” said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International’s Asia-Pacific Director.

“The Sri Lankan government’s failure to provide justice and protect human rights, even after it defeated the LTTE, has forced the international community to act by offering assistance to improve the dire situation in the country.

“The vote supported by Nigeria, India as well as a number of Latin American countries, shows that this is not a ‘north’ versus ‘south’ issue. It highlights broad concern in the international community that the human rights situation in Sri Lanka is moving in the wrong direction.”

There are credible allegations of serious violations of international law in Sri Lanka’s long armed conflict, which ended in May 2009, including the use of civilians as human shields by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and shelling by Sri Lankan forces of hospitals and civilian areas.

In May 2009, in a joint statement with Ban Ki-Moon, the President of Sri Lanka committed to provide accountability for alleged human rights violations in the armed conflict.

The government of Sri Lanka that year set up the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), a national commission of inquiry to investigate “events” during the armed conflict and make recommendations for post-conflict reconciliation. [As documented in an Amnesty International report in September 2011](#), the LLRC lacked independence, and did not properly investigate allegations of war crimes.

“Despite its many problems, the LLRC did highlight some of the serious human rights issues in the country, and the persistent failure to address these issues by the authorities. Nor has the Sri Lankan government implemented the LLRC’s own recommendations,” said Sam Zarifi.

“Even many of the countries who abstained or voted against the resolution urged the Sri Lankan government to implement LLRC recommendations - such as improving the treatment of detainees and investigating serious human rights violations.”

The government of Sri Lanka has repeatedly affirmed its commitment to implementing the LLRC's recommendations, but no action has so far been taken. The UN resolution calls on Sri Lanka to implement the recommendations of the LLRC. It also calls on Sri Lanka to address alleged violations of international law and asks the UN to assist Sri Lanka in these efforts.

In the run up to the vote there were numerous reports of threatening behaviour against Sri Lankan human rights defenders. Amnesty International calls on the government of Sri Lanka to stop fostering hostility against the UN and publicly condemn the sustained attacks on human rights advocates.

“They must end their campaign of intimidating peaceful critics, and instead get on with the task of fulfilling the recommendations of their own national inquiry and their obligations under international law.”

“The international community should support Sri Lanka to implement the resolution, and should be prepared - if investigations and prosecutions fail to materialise - to establish an independent international inquiry into the allegations of war crimes in the armed conflict,” said Zarifi.

Background

Previous Amnesty International statements on Sri Lanka

13 March 2012 - Sri Lanka's shameful record on detention without trial

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/sri-lanka-s-shameful-record-detention-without-trial-2012-03-13>

16 December 2011 - Sri Lanka report falls short:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/sri-lanka-report-falls-short-2011-12-16>

13 December 2011 - Sri Lanka: Human Rights Council must act on report

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/sri-lanka-human-rights-council-must-act-report-2011-09-13>

12 September 2011 - Truth and Justice needed to solve Sri Lanka's rights crisis

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/un-truth-and-justice-needed-resolve-sri-lanka-rights-crisis-2011-09-12>

7 September 2011 - Inquiry into armed conflict fundamentally flawed

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/sri-lanka-inquiry-armed-conflict-fundamentally-flawed-2011-09-07>

Notes to Editors

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