



Sri Lanka: Statement at the 22nd session of the UN Human Rights Council (25 February – 22 March 2013)

AI Index: ASA 37/016/2013
1 March 2013

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

General Debate

Mr. President,

Amnesty International welcomes the compelling report of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on Sri Lanka. We concur with the important observation by the High Commissioner for Human Rights that the attention given by the Human Rights Council to the issues of accountability and reconciliation in Sri Lanka has made an important contribution to preserving space to discuss human rights within Sri Lanka.

Unfortunately, it is also clear that the Government of Sri Lanka has not demonstrated willingness to secure justice and reconciliation in the aftermath of Sri Lanka's protracted armed conflict. Continued reports of human rights violations – including extrajudicial killings, abductions and enforced disappearance - underscore the urgent need to end impunity. We have heard many words and empty promises in that regard, but seen no progress.

The Government of Sri Lanka has spent the last year trying to deflect international criticism and lashing out at its Sri Lankan critics instead of remedying past human rights violations or preventing new ones.

The Government has rebuffed technical assistance proffered by the UN to improve the human rights situation. It has steadfastly resisted independent investigations of alleged violations of human rights and humanitarian law. It continues to rely on the forces associated with the violations to investigate and police themselves. This approach cannot be taken seriously. The Ministry of Defence, armed forces and police cannot credibly investigate alleged violations by their own personnel possibly acting on the orders of senior commanders and government ministers.

Intolerance of dissent, even at the apex of the judicial system, combined with the Government's unwillingness to rein in abusive members of its security force and political supporters or account for their actions, is also impeding progress on human rights and post-conflict reconciliation. The High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers warned that Sri Lanka's impeachment of the Chief Justice in January "could undermine the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law."

Amnesty International urges this Council to establish a mechanism devoted to monitoring and reporting on the current human rights situation in Sri Lanka and to lend support to an independent international investigation into allegations of crimes under international law committed in Sri Lanka. As suggested by the High Commissioner, such an investigation could also serve to monitor any domestic accountability process, should one ever emerge.

Thank you Mr. President.