



Freedom from Torture

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His Excellency Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
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By Email: rcolville@ohchr.org

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Your Excellency

I am writing to you in advance of next week's Universal Periodic Review of Sri Lanka and in light of the recent press coverage of recent torture including sexual torture and rape at the hands of the police and Sri Lankan army. I would like to take this opportunity to urge you to commit to a full investigation of these reports.

Freedom from Torture is a UK based human rights organisation and one of the largest torture rehabilitation centres in the world. In 2017 for the sixth year in a row Sri Lanka was the top country of origin for those referred to us for clinical services.

In 2015 we published a research report, *Tainted Peace: Torture in Sri Lanka since May 2009*, which analysed forensic documentation produced by expert doctors in our Medico-Legal Report Service of torture which had taken place after the end of the conflict. Since the release of *Tainted Peace* we have submitted to relevant UN mechanisms, including next week's UPR, updates on our research expanding our initial case set to reflect the new cases of torture, particularly highlighting cases since the change in government in 2015.

Our evidence is consistent with the recent press reports and suggests that torture remains deeply ingrained in the military, police and intelligence sectors in peacetime Sri Lanka and that those at risk include Tamils with a real or perceived association with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, even at very low levels and/or indirectly via family members or associates.

We recognise that the transitional period in Sri Lanka is a politically sensitive time and were pleased to see a letter from the MFA to the New York Times stating that the government condemns torture. However, we remain deeply concerned by the lack of progress in turning statements such as these into actions that effectively address accountability for historic and current allegations of torture. We also do not see any meaningful steps towards dismantling the structures that are perpetuating torture practices and see this as a dangerous undermining of attempts to rebuild a united country after decades of conflict.

In consultations with survivors they have emphasised to us that ensuring a credible and effective accountability process for serious and continued human rights abuses remains a priority for them. We know that this is an area of deep interest to you and welcome your recent remarks suggesting that a closer inspection of these allegations may be called for. We would like to encourage you to undertake an investigation of evidence of ongoing torture immediately. This would send a powerful message to survivors that the UN remains committed to supporting accountability and preventing torture from happening to others. It would also demonstrate to the government that addressing human rights abuses is central to political and economic development and must not be sidelined.

Please do not hesitate to get in contact if we can be of any further assistance.

With best wishes

Sonya Sceats
Director of Policy and Advocacy