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“Unbearable treatment”: Torture continues, despite Sri Lankan government’s promise of ‘zero tolerance’, Freedom from Torture evidence finds

- **Freedom from Torture evidence shows torture has continued in security operations under supposedly ‘human rights friendly’ Sri Lankan government elected in 2015**
- **In 2018, Sri Lanka was – for the seventh successive year – the top country of origin for torture survivors referred to the charity**
- **Freedom from Torture calls on the Sri Lankan government to agree to time-bound implementation of commitments it made to its citizens and the international community**

Ten years on from the end of Sri Lanka’s civil war, Freedom from Torture has documented evidence of torture of its Tamil citizens in the context of ongoing security operations. This is despite the Sri Lankan government’s stated ‘zero tolerance’ policy on torture, and commitments to promote human rights when it was elected in 2015.

Freedom from Torture has compiled a briefing based on 16 cases of Sri Lankan nationals who were detained and tortured between 2015 and 2017. Drawn from expert medico-legal reports carried out by the charity’s doctors, the research found that:

- All 16 individuals were tortured by state officials during interrogation to extract information about **alleged ongoing links to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)** or anti-government activity. None were charged under anti-terror, or any other, legislation.
- All experienced **physical and psychological forms of torture** including beating with instruments, burning and asphyxiation.
- Over half of **the people were raped and most experienced sexual torture.**

The briefing follows on from a 2015 Freedom from Torture report [‘Tainted Peace’](#). This recorded the systematic torture of Tamils after the end of the civil war in 2009, under then-President Mahinda Rajapaksa. This abuse was carried out in a network of torture facilities by the Sri Lankan military, police and intelligence services. Heavy scarring left on bodies of the survivors in the report suggested the perpetrators tortured without fear of consequences. Freedom from Torture’s latest evidence shows that little has changed, despite the assurances of the government to the contrary.

New beginnings?

In 2015, the new government of President Sirisena pledged to promote accountability and human rights, including to the UN Human Rights Council. Both are vital for reconciliation. Sri Lanka has made some progress on a broader human rights reform agenda, yet the steps taken have fallen short. The UN Human Rights Council will decide in March 2019 whether or not to retain its focus on Sri Lanka. The evidence in our briefing, combined with the slow progress made by the government on commitments undertaken four years ago, suggests that the imperative for ongoing international monitoring and oversight is strong. Sri Lankan torture survivors receiving Freedom from Torture’s services have identified the Human Rights Council process as an important mechanism for delivering justice.

Freedom from Torture calls to the **Government of Sri Lanka** include making the ‘zero tolerance’ policy on torture a reality by suspending accused perpetrators from duty and reaffirming Sri Lanka’s

commitment to promoting reconciliation and human rights through a renewed Human Rights Council resolution that has time bound commitments for implementation.

Steve Crawshaw, Director of Policy & Advocacy at Freedom from Torture says:

“The government’s proclaimed commitment to protect human rights seems empty, in the context of ongoing torture. We don’t need box-ticking exercises, we need meaningful change.

“The constitutional and political crisis in December made clear that any progress can be too easily reversed. The government shouldn’t act only when there is international pressure. Sri Lanka owes it to its people to stop torture once and for all and to hold perpetrators to account”

-Ends-

Notes to editors:

- For media queries, please contact **Aalia Khan (UK)** - (E: Akhan@freedomfromtorture.org, T: +44 7697 7837), or **Steve Crawshaw (Sri Lanka)** - (E: scrawshaw@freedomfromtorture.org, T: +94 77 3740642
- This briefing is based on 16 medico-legal reports prepared by Freedom from Torture between April 2015 and August 2018. All 16 gave consent for their information to be used for research
- The number and nature of cases available to Freedom from Torture for research at any one time are defined by many contingent factors. These include whether a person can flee his or her country; the time it takes to escape; at what point they disclose their experience of torture; the availability of specialist immigration lawyers in the context of reduced legal aid and the timing of the instruction for a medico-legal report. Medico-legal reports produced by Freedom from Torture are based on international standards set out in the UN Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, otherwise known as the ‘Istanbul Protocol’; on this basis they carry considerable weight within national and international jurisdictions and are capable of providing corroboration of torture.
- [Freedom from Torture](http://www.freedomfromtorture.org) is the only UK-based human rights organisation dedicated to the treatment and rehabilitation of torture survivors. We do this by offering services across England and Scotland to around 1,000 torture survivors a year, including psychological and physical therapies, forensic documentation of torture, legal and welfare advice, creative projects, and by campaigning for their rights nationally and internationally