

# UN report on Sri Lanka war crimes

## How can justice and democratic rights be secured?

A United Nations (UN) report published on 29 April on the final phase of Sri Lanka's civil war in 2009 reveals "credible allegations" of war crimes perpetrated by the ruling regime of president Mahinda Rajapaksa. The right wing Rajapaksa regime has used the defeat of the LTTE (Tamil Tigers) to consolidate its grip on the country. SENAN, Tamil Solidarity international coordinator, explains why the report is a dead letter and what attitude the Tamil Diaspora should adopt in its struggle for democratic rights and Tamil self-determination.

**T**he UN panel report, published after considerable delay, confirms what Tamil Solidarity and others have been saying about the slaughter of Tamils in Sri Lanka over the last two years. The panel was set up by the UN secretary general Ban-Ki Moon in June 2010 to advise him on Sri Lanka.

The report confirms our claims that the Sri Lankan military massacred more than 40,000 people in the final phase of the war that ended in May 2009. They constantly bombed hospitals, schools, temporary shelters and so-called 'no fire zones'. Every single one of 400,000 refugees was then taken, en masse, to 'detention camps' with no proper facilities. Deaths and gross humanitarian abuses took place during the transportation and in the camps.

### No illusions

However, there should not be any illusions that this report will bring about any change in the conditions of the victims in Sri Lanka. The day after its publication the Guardian newspaper reported that the UN secretary general "would only launch an international investigation if the Sri Lankan government agrees or an 'international forum' such as the United Nations security council calls for an inquiry".

Obviously, the Sri Lankan government will not allow any international investigations. In fact, the publication of the belated panel report was itself further delayed by the Sri Lankan government's protests. The Sri Lankan External Affairs minister, GL Peiris, called the report "preposterous" and "baseless".

Despite the report's own admission that "during the final stages of the war, the United Nations' political organs and bodies failed to take actions that might have prevented civilians' deaths" no apology has been made on the part of the UN so far. Instead it continues its inaction.

Numerous appeals for action to stop the war and prevent mass murder of Tamil-speaking people were made during the war in early 2009. On 31 January 2009 over 100,000 marched through London in opposition to the slaughter. Internationally, hundreds of thousands of Tamils and others took to the streets. After the war the demands for genuine humanitarian measures continued.

In the silence and inaction on the part of the UN and governments, untold horror and mass murder took place. And the human rights abuses and killings continue to this date.

The UN made no attempt whatsoever to stop the killings. Further-



Part of a huge demo in London against the war in Sri Lanka in 2009 photo Paul Mattsson

more, it made no apology for passing a resolution, within just ten days of the major massacre, clearing the Sri Lankan government of wrong doing.

Even though the UN gives the illusion that it is an independent body, it would be naïve to imagine that the UN will go beyond the interests of its major components: the US, the UK, India, China and Russia.

Nor does the UN have a credible record of preventing mass murders taking place in other areas of the world. For example, the UN did not prevent the massacres in Congo. In Rwanda, the world's powers stood by and watched the genocide of up to a million people.

### UN security council

The UN Security Council currently includes government representatives from Russia, China and India, who not only funded the Sri Lankan government's military but who continue to protect it. After the report was published the Sri Lankan defence secretary, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, announced that Sri Lanka "will have to seek protection from countries like Russia and China".

These governments' actions are an extension of how they treat their own people. The brutal role of India in Kashmir and other parts of the country is well-known. Similarly, the role of the Russian government in Chechnya, and China's human rights abuses in Tibet and the rest of the country are recognised globally.

The Sri Lankan regime is cynically using anti-imperialist rhetoric among the masses. The former Sri Lankan UN Ambassador, Dayan Jayatilaka, attacked the western imperialist powers at the eleventh special session at UNHCR refugee agency in May 2009: "These are the same people who told the world Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. I wouldn't buy a used car from these people let alone allegations of war crimes," he declared.

Gotabhaya Rajapaksa went even further in his 'analysis' and announced: "They are jealous of us because they have not defeated terrorism as we have".

The regime is using the UN and

imperialist hypocrisy to their advantage just like Gaddafi in Libya. While strongly opposing the human rights abuses and exploitation of imperialist powers, it's important to also expose the hypocrisy behind the anti-imperialist language of the Sri Lankan regime.

But despite the rhetoric, the Sri Lankan regime is ever so cooperative with both regional and western imperialist powers. The contradiction over 'human rights' is partly due to the competition between the regional powers like China and India and Western imperialism which seeks to establish favourable conditions to gain economic advantage.

Capitalist institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank sanctioned loans to the Sri Lankan government and promote Sri Lanka as an 'investment paradise'. The Sri Lankan government is now ruthlessly executing IMF-led policies such as privatisation, attacks on pensions and 'tax reforms'.

The Rajapaksa regime's alleged anti-imperialist stance and whipping up of Sinhala nationalism is also intended to divert the attention of the working and poor masses from Rajapaksa's brutal attacks on their living conditions and services.

Furthermore we will not see the IMF or World Bank withdraw their loans amid the 'credible war crime' allegations. Even after the UN panel report was leaked to the media, key members in the US congress were advocating a 'stronger US-Sri Lankan relationship'.

The newly named co-chair of the Sri Lankan Congressional caucus, Chris Van Hollen, a Democrat who defends Obama's cuts budget, is urging all his colleagues to support this call. In other words what, in reality, this report could achieve for the oppressed masses will be very minimal.

### Tamil Diaspora

The UN report also blames the separatist LTTE (Tamil Tigers) for using civilians trapped in the war zone as human shields.

Tamil Solidarity, while standing firmly against the Sri Lankan re-

gime, consistently questioned the methods of the LTTE. We also criticised the LTTE with regard to the internal killings, attacks against the Muslim population, and the shooting of civilians in the final phase of the war. The majority of the active layer in the Diaspora will not deny these facts.

But while it is important for the Diaspora Tamils to distance themselves from the mistakes of the LTTE, it must not allow room for bodies such as the UN to attack Diaspora campaigns. Advising the Diaspora that their key role is to denounce the LTTE is aimed at paving the way towards Tamil cooperation with a future Sri Lankan government that the west will hope to do business with.

Internationally, young people in the Tamil Diaspora are drawing the conclusion that the attack against the oppressed Tamils is also a fight against all oppressed people.

Furthermore there is also an emerging insistence on democracy; the urge to work with trade unions, left organisations and other organisations that campaign for rights and against oppression.

It is understandable that the Tamils in Sri Lanka are hoping against hope that the UN report may mark a step towards support for their struggle for rights. We can understand the desperate heartbeat of poor Tamils in Sri Lanka that some 'outside force' may come to their aid. But there is no point in creating any illusions for the sake of giving temporary comfort.

Most importantly we should oppose the creation of free trade zones promised by the regime to Indian, Chinese and western governments. These zones will not be 'rehabilitation centres' but sweatshops where war victims and ex-LTTE (Tamil Tigers) members will be forced to work for as little as possible. We must rebuild strong trade unions to oppose these cruel working conditions being created at the same time as opposing the inhuman treatment of workers and low wages that already exist.

For full article see [www.tamilsolidarity.org](http://www.tamilsolidarity.org)  
See also [www.socialistworld.net](http://www.socialistworld.net)

### The Committee for a Workers' International

The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated.

The CWI is organised in 45 countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against global capitalism and to fight for a socialist world.

For more details including CWI publications write to: CWI, PO Box 3688, London E11 1YE. email [cwi@worldsoc.co.uk](mailto:cwi@worldsoc.co.uk)

### www.socialistworld.net

The CWI website contains news, reports and analysis from around the world. Recent articles include:



### USA: Bipartisan budget cuts

Is there an alternative to cuts?

Patrick Ayers, *Socialist Alternative*, (CWI, USA)



### Nigeria: The 2011 general elections and the working people

Recent elections will not improve the living standards of the working masses

Segun Sego, *general secretary, Democratic Socialist Movement* (CWI, Nigeria)



### Northern Ireland: 30th anniversary of the death of hunger striker Bobby Sands

Thatcher's brutal prisons regime

Reprinted articles by Tony Saunois and Peter Hadden with introduction (*Socialism Today*, May 2011)