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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A year of the new Sri Lankan government brings no change to Tamils

A year has passed since the new government in Sri Lanka came to power with a lot of promises to the Tamil people and the international community. None of the promises made have been delivered, but the new regime keeps on repeating its rhetoric of change.

The military's grip on the Tamil people's homeland in the North and East of the island continues unabated. An all Sinhala 160,000 strong military stationed in the Tamil people's land at a ratio of one military personnel to six civilians still occupies 42,000 acres of private land that belong to the Tamil civilians. Torture, rape, white van abductions and suppression of the Tamil people continue regardless of the regime change

The most recent report by the International Truth and Justice Project: Sri Lanka (ITJP) provides harrowing details of abduction, torture and rape of Tamil men and women, with incidents as recent as December 2015. The report based on testimonies of twenty Tamil torture survivors who had fled Sri Lanka, found that rape and torture were "widespread and systematic," and that torture based extortion could be providing approximately US \$50 million tax free money to perpetrators, every year.

UNHRC resolution HRC 30 L.29 calling for accountability for war crimes

UNHRC resolution HRC 30 L.29, specifically requested the Sri Lankan government to, initiate genuine consultations on transitional justice, in particular truth-seeking and accountability mechanisms, reparations and memorialization, with the public, victims and witness groups, civil society and other stakeholders. While no such consultation has taken place with the victims groups or the Tamil stakeholders so far, the Sri Lankan state, using the time given to it by the UN is attempting to systematically eliminate traces of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

War crime evidence removed

Evidence of torture was erased or destroyed by the army following reports that emerged where two houses located in land which was occupied by the military for over 25 years, had signs of previous use as torture cells. The Sri Lankan military has hurriedly burnt and destroyed the remaining traces of the newly discovered makeshift torture chamber within the recently released lands in Valikaamam North in Jaffna at a locality known as Pazhai-Veemankaamam. Tamil journalists had filmed the locality a few days earlier. After the photographic and video evidences were published, the SL Defence Ministry in Colombo has instructed its military at Palaali to remove any traces of the torture chamber.

This act which perverts the course of justice is only one of many indicators that the Sri Lankan state will not investigate crimes by its military or its political leadership which hold command responsibility for the genocide of the Tamil People



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Responsibility of the International community

It is essential that the International Community works to ensure that the promises made to the victims are delivered. Despite media comments by the new Sri Lankan regime much has not changed in Sri Lanka; and where actions are claimed to have been taken these have been minimal and mere PR exercises to deflect the attention of the international community.

Only an international independent justice system can address war crimes, crimes against humanity and crime of genocide. Only direct economic assistance and development empowerment through investment can improve the living conditions of the Tamil people. A political settlement that recognises the right to self-determination of Tamil people in Sri Lanka is the only solution that can deliver freedom from systemic violations of their fundamental rights by a genocidal Sri Lankan state.

We are also concerned by UK government's recent announcement of £6.6 million aid to support Sri Lanka's reconciliation and military reform, without any pre-conditions or requirements for compliance with the UNHRC resolutions. This was taken together with the unusually high allocation of defence spending for 2016 which exceeded 2014 defence expenditure of Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa's government, by over 20 billion Sri Lankan rupees, raises questions about the integrity of the new Sri Lankan government.

As an important stake holder who is genuinely interested in achieving peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka based on truth, accountability and justice, British Tamils forum requests the British government, the international community and the office of the UNHRC to take immediate action to request the Sri Lankan government to comply fully with the UNHRC resolutions in spirit and its content. Until such progress is made, we request the UK government to, immediately suspend all military and economic assistance to the Sri Lankan government.

We also request the UNHRC to immediately set up a close monitoring office in the north and east to constantly monitor the progress in complying with the UNHRC resolutions. If these developments are not addressed immediately, the fragile reconciliation process in Sri Lanka may be derailed. Tamil people deserve justice and the ability to live in peace in the land of their birth.

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Notes to Editors:

British Tamils Forum exists to harness the skills and the knowledge of the members of the forum, well-wishers and significant others including mainstream decision makers in the UK with the aim of alleviating the sufferings of the Tamils community in the Island of Sri Lanka and to further their right to self-determination within a democratic frame work under pinned by international law, its covenants and conventions.