



PEARL Condemns Ongoing Torture & Sexual Violence in Sri Lanka; Urges U.S. Government to Re-Consider its Partnership with Sri Lanka

(Washington DC, November 9, 2017) People for Equality and Relief in Lanka (PEARL) condemns the Sri Lankan government for the torture of over 60 Tamils who have now sought refuge in Europe. The International Truth and Justice Project has gathered testimonies from these Tamil men, and the Associated Press (AP) corroborated over 50 accounts by reviewing medical and psychological evaluations.

Unfortunately, this revelation is only the latest in Sri Lanka's history of crimes against Tamils. Ben Emmerson, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on torture and counter-terrorism, declared just a few months ago that torture in Sri Lanka is on an "industrial scale" and is "among the worst in the world".

Despite evidence of ongoing torture and continued impunity for atrocity crimes, Western nations are pursuing friendlier relations with the Sri Lankan state. Just this week the second Sri Lanka-U.S. Partnership Dialogue commenced in Colombo, where the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Shannon met with Sri Lanka's Foreign Secretary and heralded the country's efforts to "promote reconciliation, accountability, and human rights." U.S. engagement with the Sri Lankan military, still accused of perpetrating crimes of a systemic nature, has increased exponentially. Furthermore, in May this year the EU restored special trade status to Sri Lanka, which had been revoked in 2010 due to human rights concerns. These premature moves by the U.S. and EU only serve to embolden the Sri Lankan government, which has egregiously failed to abide by its international commitments laid out in UN Human Rights Council Resolution 30/1 to establish an accountability mechanism to address violations of international law.

The Sri Lankan government has repeatedly demonstrated that it lacks the political will to conduct investigations as per the commitments it made under Resolution 30/1, which it reaffirmed in March this year. Eight months on, progress is scant, as Sri Lanka continues to fail to lay the groundwork for a credible domestic justice mechanism. In light of this, PEARL urges the United States, the EU and the United Nations to consider and implement alternative accountability measures, such as invoking universal jurisdiction against alleged Sri Lankan war criminals. The victim-survivor community's demand for international accountability mechanisms must be re-considered in the absence of progress on 30/1.

An end to human rights violations and justice for mass atrocities are prerequisites for eventual reconciliation and non-recurrence of violence. For a peaceful, stable Sri Lanka, difficult measures must be taken while the opportunity exists. This is the time for the international community to act decisively – Sri Lanka has proven time and time again it will not act on its own.