



## **International Community Must Keep a Critical Eye Over Sri Lanka's Reform Process, Amidst Ongoing Militarization and Human Rights Violations**

(Washington, DC: June 30, 2016) PEARL welcomes the oral update from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on Sri Lanka's progress in implementing Resolution 30/1. The work of the OHCHR has been a source of hope and a focal point for Tamil victims and activists on the ground. However, in the months following the adoption of the Resolution, victims have become disillusioned with Sri Lanka's slow pace of progress. Victims and civil society are not only disappointed by the government's failure to demilitarize the North-East and to address ongoing human rights violations, but also by the international community's premature positive engagement, particularly by the US.

International pressure from UN member states and bodies is singularly vital in creating meaningful change in Sri Lanka. Even after the current 32<sup>nd</sup> session, the Human Rights Council must sustain its active role on Sri Lanka to ensure implementation of Resolution 30/1. The Human Rights Council's role is pivotal leading up to and beyond the 34<sup>th</sup> session in March 2017, when Sri Lanka will be on the Council's agenda again.

The High Commissioner's oral update reiterates several serious concerns requiring urgent attention which PEARL has previously expressed, including land grabs and militarization in the North-East, the arbitrary detention of Tamil political prisoners under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, and ongoing reports of torture and sexual abuse of detainees. The international community must ensure that Sri Lanka's progress is monitored and measured against these benchmarks. International participation in the judicial mechanism for accountability remains a key demand of the Tamil victim community. The Sri Lankan government committed to this in Resolution 30/1, and, as the High Commissioner stated, international participation is "a necessary guarantee for the independence and impartiality of the process in the eyes of victims."

"While Sri Lanka's pledges to carry out reforms are welcome, the international community must critically consider the government's lack of progress and failure to earn the Tamil community's trust before prematurely congratulating Sri Lanka on its reform efforts," PEARL Senior Analyst Dharsha Jegatheeswaran said. "As long as the government fails to acknowledge and take responsibility for the severity of crimes committed by state forces, victims will remain justifiably skeptical about the prospects for criminal accountability."

The Human Rights Council and OHCHR need to ensure that Sri Lanka abides by the terms of Resolution 30/1, particularly on the need for international participation in any accountability mechanism. In light of Sri Lanka's obfuscation on this key issue and its slow-moving reform processes overall, PEARL urges the United States and other countries to take a sterner approach in policies and statements on Sri Lanka, rather than undermine possible progress by prematurely praising Sri Lanka for making promises that remain unfulfilled.

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