



PEOPLE FOR EQUALITY AND RELIEF IN LANKA

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PEARL welcomes US sanctions against Sri Lankan army chief

(Washington, D.C.; February 14, 2020) – Today, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo banned Sri Lanka’s army chief Shavendra Silva from entering the US due to “credible information of his involvement, through command responsibility, in gross violations of human rights, namely extrajudicial killings, by the 58th Division of the Sri Lanka Army during the final phase of Sri Lanka’s Civil War in 2009.”

PEARL welcomes the travel ban imposed on Shavendra Silva and his family by the US government under Section 7031(c) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act. This sends an important message to those who committed war crimes with impunity, not only in Sri Lanka, but around the world, that the US will not tolerate their presence. This is a small, but significant, step. The designation crucially validates Tamil victims and survivors of atrocity crimes to continue the fight for justice.

Senior Sri Lankan officials — not only Silva, but also President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, and Defence Secretary Kamal Gunaratne — are implicated in war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Their involvement in extrajudicial killings may constitute war crimes and/or crimes against humanity. In fact, there is video and photographic evidence of the extrajudicial executions of bound and blind-folded Tamils, including 12-year-old Balachandran Prabhakaran, pointing to the perpetration of atrocity crimes and the command responsibility of senior leadership at that time.

As Secretary Pompeo stated, those responsible for war crimes must be held accountable. Tamil victim-survivors, including the families of the disappeared, have been demanding international justice for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide for over a decade. PEARL urges the US to build upon this step against impunity, by standing firm on accountability in its engagement with Sri Lanka. The US’s bilateral relationship with Sri Lanka must be contingent on sustainable progress on accountability and political reforms. We also urge the US government to sanction other Sri Lankan officials suspected of having committed war crimes, to utilize and support universal jurisdiction to prosecute perpetrators, and to support international efforts and venues towards justice for Tamils.