



PEARL welcomes Canada sanctions against Sri Lankan officials, urges criminal justice efforts

Washington D.C.; January 10, 2023 – PEARL welcomes the targeted sanctions against former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa; his brother, former President Mahinda Rajapaksa; and other Sri Lankan military officials by Canada under the *Special Economic Measures Act* for their involvement in gross and systematic violations of human rights.

Mahinda Rajapaksa served as President and his brother, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, served as Defence Secretary from 2005 to 2015. During their tenure, they were accused of committing egregious international crimes and deploying genocidal tactics, particularly in the final months of the armed conflict in 2009. 70,000 to 146,679 Tamils, according to the UN and local census records, respectively, are unaccounted for and presumed dead. The brothers oversaw the repeated and intentional shelling of hospitals in the North-East by the Sri Lankan military; the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of artillery against Tamil civilians in so-called No Fire Zones; and the execution of LTTE hors de combat, and Tamil civilians, including children, in contravention of the laws of war. Despite ongoing calls for justice and accountability, notably by the Tamil Families of the Disappeared, the Rajapaksas were recently voted back in power in 2019. They governed until 2022 when mass protests in the South against their economic mismanagement of the country led to their resignation. Ratnayake was involved in the brutal Mirusuvil Massacre in 2000, and Hettiarachchi was connected to the abduction of the eleven Tamil youth from 2008 to 2009 and the murder of an MP.

Justice and accountability for these crimes remain unaddressed. Tamils in the North-East still deal with enforced disappearances, militarization, land grabs, and other human rights issues disproportionately affecting them, as well as the ongoing trauma from the genocide. The Sri Lankan state's impunity and treatment of genocidaires as 'war heroes' continues unabated. The pernicious Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist politics responsible for repeatedly voting the Rajapaksas into power on the island shows the ongoing lack of appetite for domestic accountability for the Rajapaksas' crimes against Tamil and Muslim communities. For this reason, it is up to the international community to ensure justice and accountability for Tamils.

The sanctions are an important victory, but more must be done. In recognition of the Tamil victim-survivor community's ongoing prioritization of criminal justice, PEARL encourages Canada and the wider international community to move beyond sanctions and commit to supporting victim-centric internationalized justice mechanisms, and to exercise universal jurisdiction to hold perpetrators accountable. They should ensure that any future accountability mechanisms are developed with meaningful input from the Tamil victim-survivor community. Canada's designations, whilst historic, are initial measures in the broader struggle for justice in Sri Lanka. PEARL, as ever, continues to stand ready to support this process.

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