

## **International community must speak out on human rights abuses and reprisals in Sri Lanka**

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The UN Human Rights Council is currently meeting in Geneva and high on its agenda is a US-led push for credible and independent investigations into war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by both government and Tamil Tiger forces in the closing months of the civil war in 2009. A UN panel of experts estimates that over 40,000 civilians died during the final stages of that brutal conflict.

In articles published in the [Sri Lankan press](#) yesterday, a senior Sri Lankan government minister is reported to have said that plans are in place to arrest opposition parliamentarians and human rights advocates who are currently in Geneva lobbying for international support for the US-led accountability resolution. The reports cite the Minister as saying that the advocates are being closely surveilled by Sri Lankan intelligence forces and that they will be arrested on their return from Geneva if they "have made statements detrimental to the unitary character of the state".

According to ISHR Director Phil Lynch, "This latest attempt to intimidate human rights defenders is a continuation of a disturbing pattern, which has included targeting journalists and even impeaching a chief justice."

"Since the end of the war in 2009 the Sri Lankan government has systematically sought to silence dissent and the voices of human rights defenders calling for proper investigations and an end to impunity," Mr Lynch said.

According to Mr Lynch, Sri Lanka's systematic intimidation of human rights defenders at home is reflected in the government's conduct at the UN. "Last time human rights defenders from Sri Lanka came to the UN to support calls for an independent investigation into alleged war crimes a cabinet Minister personally threatened to 'break their limbs'."

At the current session of the Council Sri Lanka has called for the UN accreditation of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch to be suspended or withdrawn for deigning to screen a film, *No Fire Zone*, which graphically documents human rights atrocities in the north of the country.

"The time has come for the international community to loudly and unequivocally condemn this pattern of reprisals against human rights defenders," said Mr Lynch.

"As UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has himself said, 'States have a responsibility to respect human rights and protect those who advocate for fundamental rights. When they fail to do so, the United Nations must stand up and speak out.' As the UN's peak human rights body, the UN Human Rights Council must stand up and speak out."

"Speaking out in defence of human rights, democracy and the rule of law is itself a fundamental human right," said Mr Lynch. "When a state moves to systematically deny and violate this right the international community - both collectively and individually - has a responsibility to act. In the case of Sri Lanka, that time has come."

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