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Sri Lanka Tamil killings 'ordered from the top'

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JONATHAN MILLER
Foreign Affairs Correspondent



Exclusive: a senior Sri Lankan army commander and frontline soldier tell Channel 4 News that point-blank executions of Tamils at the end of the Sri Lankan civil war were carried out under orders.

Jonathan Miller's report contain images some viewers may find disturbing.

It was a decisive end to a brutal 30-year war in which both sides stand accused of war crimes. The final showdown in Sri Lanka's war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil

Eelam (LTTE) was as bloody as the campaign the Tigers had waged for a Tamil homeland.

A year ago, they were finally cornered, along with 100,000 civilians in their [ever-shrinking coastal enclave](#), ironically called the "No-Fire Zone".

Despite allegations of war crimes, one year on Sri Lanka's government had managed to avoid an independent inquiry. But the evidence continues to mount.

"Yes, our commander ordered us to kill everyone. We killed everyone."*Sri Lankan soldier*

In [August 2009](#) **Channel 4 News** obtained video evidence, later [authenticated by the United Nations](#), purporting to show point-blank executions of Tamils by uniformed Sri Lankan soldiers.

Now a senior army commander and a frontline soldier have told **Channel 4 News** that such killings were indeed ordered from the top.

One frontline soldier said: "Yes, our commander ordered us to kill everyone. We killed everyone."

And a senior Sri Lankan army commander said: "Definitely, the order would have been to kill everybody and finish them off.

"I don't think we wanted to keep any hardcore elements, so they were done away with. It is clear that such orders were, in fact, received from the top."

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Frontline soldier's account

QUESTION: Did civilians die?

ANSWER: Yes. Army died, LTTE died, civilians died.

QUESTION: Did you kill civilians?

ANSWER: Yes, we did.

QUESTION: What happened when the LTTE and their families surrendered with white flag?

ANSWER: First we arrest them, tortured them, then killed them. In the final days we straight killed them... a lot of people died. A lot of bodies were there. Yes, our commander ordered us to kill everyone. We killed everyone."

Pictures snapped by a soldier which have emerged depict the onslaught and aftermath from the government side. In one, the body of the Tamil Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran is paraded for trophy videos.

The senior military officer we interviewed told us that the rebel leader's 13-year-old son surrendered with his bodyguards. He claims the boy was interrogated about his father's location, then shot.



Many of the soldier's photographs depict large numbers of dead bodies; some clearly combatants, some civilians, most, unclear.

In another photo, Sri Lankan soldiers stand over two dead Tamil women, whose hands appear

bound behind their backs.

According to the army commander, the message was basically "take no prisoners".

"There is nothing to gain from them other than getting rid of them. There is no point in

keeping such people. That would have been the instructions.

"If any cadres surrendered they would have thought it is going to be another problem and they would just be keeping it for the next generation."

War crimes prosecutors are interested in what they call the line of command. The man who gave the commanders their orders is Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa; his brother is Sri Lanka's president.

The senior army commander said: "I don't know if he's more powerful, but he uses his brother's powers. So, the military, the ground forces, the police are under him. That's a lot of power. They run the show how they want. They thought that by winning the war they could rule this country for many years."

And the strategy kind of worked. The president was re-elected in January and his coalition's now won a landslide in parliament. But victory has come at a price.

The country is torn in two; the Tamil minority traumatised and cowed. The Sinhalese majority is fraught by infighting, as is the army. The senior military source brands the President's ruling clique a "mafia".

Sri Lankan journalists writing too critically or asking too many questions have been



sentenced to many years of hard labour; others have been murdered or abducted or disappeared.

To dissent is to sign your own death warrant. The regime insiders who spoke to us are in hiding - and no wonder.

More than 20 Sri Lankan journalists fled into exile abroad. On the island many are in hiding. One of them told **Channel 4 News**: "People are living as though under anesthetic. It's as though they cannot feel what is going on. There is invisible horror and terror. You can't see it and this is the most dangerous thing that is happening in this country.

"This is the most important thing that I have to say: to ask the world to open its eyes to what is going on here."

Statement from the Sri Lankan High Commission

The High Commission of Sri Lanka in the United Kingdom totally deny the allegations made against the government of Sri Lanka and its armed forces. As it has been repeatedly stressed and supported by evidence, government's security forces were engaged in a humanitarian operation with the objective of rescuing the civilians held as human shields by a terrorist outfit: the LTTE, which was banned in many countries including the UK. All internationally accepted standards and norms of such operations

were followed in the prosecution of the humanitarian operation by the security forces which were under strict orders to follow a zero civilian casualty policy.

The government of Sri Lanka is now in the process of rebuilding and reconciliation. The president of Sri Lanka has established the "Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission" of eight eminent persons reflecting all ethnic groups in Sri Lanka to inquire and report institutional administrative and legislative measures which need to be taken in order to prevent any recurrence of such concerns in the future, and to promote further national unity and reconciliation among all communities.

This High Commission is not in a position to make comments on specific allegations said to have been made in the video without viewing it. Therefore, we appreciate it if you could forward the said video to the High Commission for viewing and for verifying its authenticity prior to the telecast.

High Commission of Sri Lanka
The United Kingdom
18 May 2010

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