



US Senators call for War Crimes investigations in Sri Lanka

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Noting that, "Human rights violations continue, and the Sri Lankan government has failed to bring to justice the perpetrators of attacks against journalists, religious and ethnic minorities, and opposition politicians. As the March session of the UNHRC approaches, I believe another UNHRC resolution is warranted," a senior Democratic Senator Casey, and Republican Senator Richard Burr, in a resolution called "on the United States and the international community to establish an independent international accountability mechanism to evaluate reports of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other human rights violations committed by both sides during and after the war in Sri Lanka."

Full text of the Press release issued on the 10th of February from the offices of U.S. Senators, Richard Burr (R-NC) and Bob Casey (D-PA), follows:

Washington, DC- With the March session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) approaching, U.S. Senators Richard Burr (R-NC) and Bob Casey (D-PA) introduced a resolution calling for an independent investigation into allegations of war crimes during the Sri Lankan conflict and urging the Government of Sri Lanka to uphold media freedoms.



Senator Casey
(D-Pennsylvania)

"This resolution calls for the establishment of an independent international accountability mechanism that would hold responsible those who have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity," said Senator Burr. "I believe ensuring a lasting peace in Sri Lanka is in the interest of the Sri Lankan people, the United States, and the broader international community."



Senator Richard
Burr

"Four years since the end of the conflict in Sri Lanka, there has yet to be real progress made on reconciliation and accountability through domestic processes," said Senator Casey. "Human rights violations continue, and the Sri Lankan government has failed to bring to justice the perpetrators of attacks against journalists, religious and ethnic minorities, and opposition politicians. As the March session of the UNHRC approaches, I believe another UNHRC resolution is warranted."

The full text of Burr and Casey's resolution can be seen below:

Expressing support for the internal rebuilding, resettlement, and reconciliation within Sri Lanka that are necessary to ensure a lasting peace.

Whereas May 19, 2013 marks the four-year anniversary of the end of the 26-year conflict between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Government of Sri Lanka;

Whereas the people of Sri Lanka suffered greatly as a result of this conflict, the impact and aftermath of which has been felt especially by women, children, and families;

Whereas the Government of Sri Lanka established a "Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission" (LLRC) to report whether any person, group, or institution directly or indirectly bears responsibility for incidents that occurred between February 2002 and May 2009 and to recommend measures to prevent the recurrence of such incidents in the future and promote further national unity and reconciliation among all communities;

Whereas the LLRC report was presented to the Sri Lankan Parliament on December 16, 2011, and officially translated into Sinhala and Tamil on August 16, 2012,

Whereas the LLRC report acknowledges important events and grievances, that have contributed to decades of political violence and war in Sri Lanka and makes constructive recommendations on a wide range of issues, including the need to credibly investigate widespread allegations of extrajudicial killings; enforced disappearances; intentional targeting of civilians and noncombatants; demilitarizing the north and the country as a whole; reaching a political settlement with minority communities on the meaningful decentralization of power; and promoting and protecting the right to freedom of expression for all through the enactment of a right to information law and additional rule of law reforms;

Whereas the Government of Sri Lanka developed the National Plan of Action to implement just 82 of the 285 recommendations of the LLRC in August 2011, and although the Government of Sri Lanka has made some progress on rehabilitation, resettlement of displaced persons, and improvements of infrastructure in the North and East, there are still many issues of major concern;

Whereas the Government of Sri Lanka has yet to reasonably address issues of reconciliation and accountability through internal processes;

Whereas the Department of State's 2012 Human Rights Report on Sri Lanka outlines ongoing concerns regarding landownership and property restitution, particularly in the Jaffna Peninsula where large numbers of persons have not received restitution for land that remains part of government high security zones; and while citizens generally were able to travel almost anywhere in the island, there continues to be police and military checkpoints in the north, and de facto high-security zones and other areas remained off limits to citizens;

Whereas the Government of Sri Lanka has not taken tangible steps toward demilitarization of civilian functions, particularly in the North and East, and continued military presence on private lands in the North is preventing the resettlement of internally displaced persons who desire a return to peaceful life;

Whereas the Department of State's 2012 Human Rights Report on Sri Lanka also includes reports of serious human rights violations such as, unlawful killings by security forces and government-allied paramilitary groups, often in predominantly Tamil areas; torture and abuse of detainees by police and security forces; and arbitrary arrest and detention by authorities;

Whereas the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) resolution supported by the United States and adopted by the UNHRC on March 21, 2013, expresses concern at the continuing reports of violations of human rights in Sri Lanka, including enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, torture and violations of the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, as well as intimidation of and reprisals against human rights defenders, members of civil society and journalists, threats to judicial independence and the rule of law, and discrimination on the basis of religion or belief;

Whereas the Government of Sri Lanka expressed its commitment to addressing the needs of all ethnic groups and has recognized, in the past, the necessity of a political settlement and reconciliation for a peaceful and just society;

Whereas tangible progress on domestic and international investigations into reports of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other human rights violations during and after the conflict and promoting reconciliation would facilitate enhanced United States engagement and investment in Sri Lanka: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate —

1. commends the representatives of the United States on their leadership on United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution (UNHRC) 22/1 adopted by the UNHRC on March 21, 2013 promoting reconciliation and

- accountability in Sri Lanka;
2. calls on the United States and the international community to establish an independent international accountability mechanism to evaluate reports of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other human rights violations committed by both sides during and after the war in Sri Lanka.
 3. urges the Government of Sri Lanka to allow unimpeded access for media, international aid agencies and human rights groups into all regions of the country, as well as to detention sites that may hold political and war prisoners;
 4. urges the Government of Sri Lanka to end its media restrictions, including the obstacles to the flow of information in the North and East, and bring to justice those responsible for attacks on journalists and newspaper offices;
 5. calls upon the President to develop a comprehensive policy towards Sri Lanka that reflects United States interests, including respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law, economic interests, and security interests.

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