

INTERNATIONAL
TRUTH
AND JUSTICE
PROJECT

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Press Release: UN Committee Against Torture should Investigate Secret Torture Sites Still Operating in Sri Lanka.

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Johannesburg: The International Truth and Justice Project calls upon the UN Committee Against Torture to visit Sri Lanka to conduct an independent investigation into the continued “white van” abductions, torture and sexual violence committed by the Sri Lankan security forces. The committee meets in Geneva this week to examine torture in Sri Lanka.

“Intelligence and security operatives continue to target Tamils for illegal detention in secret sites and inflict on them horrific torture and sexual violence with impunity, despite the change of government in January 2015,” said the executive director of the International Truth and Justice Project, Yasmin Sooka. *“Torture and abduction are so systematic and entrenched in the DNA of the security forces that even a realignment of political parties in parliament and the new government under President Sirisena are not able to stop these crimes. It requires political will and a commitment on the part of the Government of Sri Lanka to carry out a comprehensive security sector reform programme which is sadly missing in Sri Lanka.”*

The ITJP has collected testimony from 36 Tamil victims in three European countries, who have suffered abduction, illegal detention, torture and/or sexual violence at the hands of intelligence and security officers under the Sirisena government. In 10 of these cases the victims have already been granted asylum, meaning their cases have already been found credible by foreign governments. Overall ITJP has more than two hundred statements from Sri Lankan victims of alleged war crimes and post-war torture and sexual violence who have fled the country. The organisation has also begun to identify some alleged perpetrators.

“I want the outside world to know that torture is still happening in Sri Lanka and the torture that I suffered,” said a young Tamil woman abducted in a “white van” and gang raped this year in illegal detention in the north of Sri Lanka.

“I was tortured and I want people to know what happened to me and to ensure that nothing like this will happen to anyone else again,” said a young male victim, “I have nightmares most of the time where I fear that they will come with guns to kill me. The day I attempted suicide I had been having these nightmares”.

In some cases the traumatised victims have been detained and brutally tortured two or three times since the end of the civil war in 2009. Typical torture methods in Sri Lanka include beating with pipes, burning with cigarette butts, branding with hot metal rods, whipping with wires and cables, submerging the head in water, hanging upside down, falaka, asphyxiation in a plastic bag soaked in petrol or chilli, as well as oral, anal and vaginal gang rape of both men and women. Victims describe being illegally abducted, interrogated, tortured and released for ransom in identical ways by multiple groups of perpetrators in multiple secret locations over several years, indicating the process has been systematised. In six incidents during 2015 and 2016 victims describe what appear to be senior officers present during their interrogation, further indicating this is not just low-level soldiers or policemen involved in opportunistic crime. At least 9 of the 35 victims believe they were detained and tortured in a Sri Lankan army camp after being abducted in the north of the island.

“The international community, including the UN is under an obligation to ensure that the Government of Sri Lanka honours its commitments made in the Human Rights Council in regard to the transitional justice programme in Sri Lanka. “Overlooking the ongoing violations is not doing either the Government of Sri Lanka a favour or the victims, whose suffering should not be swept under the carpet just because of political expediency .” said Yasmin Sooka,

Ends

See Chart of 2015 and 2016 cases.

