

UN body passes further resolution on Sri Lankan human rights

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The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) meeting in Geneva on Thursday passed a US-backed resolution on Sri Lanka's human rights violations during the war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The resolution has nothing to do with human rights. It is part of the diplomatic manoeuvring by the US and other major powers to advance their interests in South Asia, in particular by pressuring President Mahinda Rajapakse's government to reduce its reliance on China.

The UNHRC resolution was adopted amid fresh evidence of war crimes. Britain's Channel 4 produced a documentary containing photographs exposing the Sri Lankan military's extrajudicial killing of the 12-year-old son of LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran in the final days of the war in 2009. Human Rights Watch compiled a report on the widespread sexual harassment of Tamil detainees. Already, in 2011, a UN expert panel had published a report which estimated that around 40,000 civilians were killed during the last weeks of the military offensive in 2009 and concluded there was credible evidence of war crimes. As it has done in the past, the Rajapakse government simply denied the latest revelations.

After months of backroom haggling, the US resolution, backed by 25 countries, with 13 opposed and 8 abstentions, is little different to one passed by the UN body a year ago. It "welcomed" the government's promise to hold provincial elections in the island's Tamil majority north, and the "progress" in infrastructure rebuilding, de-mining and resettlement. At the same time, it calls on the Rajapakse government "to conduct its own independent and credible investigation into allegations of violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law."

This is nothing but asking the government to probe its own war crimes. The *New York Times* described the resolution as "polite diplomatic shorthand for growing evidence that soldiers killed tens of thousands of civilians."

In a media statement, US Secretary of State John Kerry urged the Sri Lankan government "to implement the recommendations of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation

Commission (LLRC) and to reverse recent negative developments on rule of law and human rights." The US "stands ready to assist with this vital work," he added.

The LLRC was a government whitewash, established by Rajapakse during 2010 in a bid to deflect criticism, including from the US, and cover up war crimes. It made limited proposals to disarm paramilitary forces, probe disappearances and extrajudicial killings and forge power-sharing arrangements with the Tamil capitalist elite. Yet, Rajapakse's government shelved even those proposals.

Kerry's statement is thoroughly hypocritical. The US and other global powers backed the war against the LTTE and only voiced human rights criticisms in the final months of the military onslaught. China had emerged as the principal supplier of weapons and financial aid to Rajapakse's government, and later underwrote infrastructure projects, including a port complex at Hambantota, which the US regards as a key location aside vital shipping routes in the Indian Ocean.

India voted for the resolution, seeking to advance its economic and strategic interests in what it regards as its sphere of influence. The Indian government engaged in behind-the-scene machinations to water down the resolution. For instance, the US draft had called for "unfettered access" for UNHRC officials to visit Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan cabinet minister Keheliya Rambukwella said Colombo was "grateful to India" for removing this and other clauses.

New Delhi wanted these changes to appease the Colombo government, fearing that greater pressure would push Rajapakse further into China's orbit. On Thursday, the *Hindu* reported: "Concern is growing in Indian security establishments over increasing the Chinese footprints in Sri Lanka's strategic sectors." India's national security council had cited collaboration between Chinese and Sri Lankan companies to launch a communication satellite as a security threat.

New Delhi also calculated that backing demands for UNHRC intervention in Sri Lanka could set a precedent for use against India's own human right violations.

Political parties in India's southern Tamil Nadu province had launched a vociferous communal campaign against Colombo, with the Dravida Munnethra Kazagam (DMK) demanding a tough stand on Sri Lanka. The New Delhi government then declared it would move strong amendments to the US draft resolution. Ultimately, however, it moved no amendments.

China, which is not a member of the UNHRC this year, expressed support for Sri Lanka at meetings on the sidelines in Geneva. On Thursday, in addition, Chinese envoy Luo Fuhe held a meeting with Rajapakse in Colombo, telling him that China supported Sri Lanka's sovereignty and opposed "groundless accusations" at international forums. To further cement ties, he announced that China would start more projects, in sectors other than infrastructure.

Rajapakse's envoy Mahinda Samarasinghe rejected the resolution outright, condemning it as "highly intrusive." He claimed that the government had "rehabilitated 12,000" Tamil detainees and that the Northern Province had experienced 27 percent economic growth last year.

In reality, the "rehabilitated" prisoners, who were detained in secret military camps, have been placed under constant monitoring by military intelligence since being released. The economic growth claim is just as fallacious, based on the regime's construction of roads and bridges in the north to attract investment and tourists. Most of the region's war-devastated people are living in poverty under an intensified military occupation.

Rajapakse branded the war crime allegations a "Western conspiracy." The government has seized upon the UNHRC resolution to whip up an anti-Western campaign. On Wednesday, about 1,000 government supporters protested outside the US embassy. Sinhala Buddhist extremist groups are also exploiting the communalist campaign by the Tamil Nadu parties to mount a counter-campaign to instigate anti-Tamil and anti-Indian sentiment.

Fomenting such communal tensions, combined with bogus anti-Western posturing, is vital for the government to divert the growing opposition among workers, youth and poor against the attacks on living conditions, jobs and wages.

Other Sri Lankan parties lined up behind the US-initiated UNHRC resolution.

MPs of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), a front of Tamil capitalist parties, visited Geneva to lobby for the resolution, which it declared would "benefit all Sri Lankans regardless of ethnicity." The TNA had campaigned for a "strong resolution." Its concern is not to protect human rights, but to persuade the Rajapakse government to strike a power-sharing agreement with it, assisted by the US and India.

Ranil Wickremesinghe, the leader of the right-wing United

National Party (UNP), urged the government to convene an all-party conference to address the major crisis that he said the resolution would produce for Sri Lanka. At his media conference, Wickremesinghe was flanked by Wickramabahu Karunaratne, leader of the pseudo-left Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP). Wickramabahu declared that the government had to implement its own LLRC recommendations.

USP, another fake "left" group that has aligned itself with the UNP, said it hoped the UNHRC resolution would "create a decisive pressure on the Rajapakse regime."

By lining up with the UNP, like several Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim communal groups, these ex-left organisations have sent a definite signal to the US and other international powers that they are following a pro-imperialist line.

The working class must reject the human rights pretences of the US and other powers, which have provided the banner for predatory interventions in Libya and now Mali and Syria. These same powers are responsible for war crimes in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, just to mention a few. At the same time, workers must oppose the police-state measures that continue to be enforced against the Tamil minority and demand the end to the military occupation of the country's North and East.

The only way forward for Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers alike is to unite across ethnic lines and with the international working class, against both Rajapakse's regime and the machinations of the imperialist powers. That means fighting for a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam, as part the struggle for a Union of Socialist Republics of South Asia, and world socialism.



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