

Tamil nationalists conceal ongoing use of torture by Sri Lankan government

K. Nesan**14 January 2016**

The US-backed regime in Sri Lanka is engaging in ongoing torture of its domestic political opponents, according to a newly-issued report from the South Africa-based International Truth and Justice Project Sri Lanka (ITJP). Its document, titled “Silenced: survivors of torture and sexual violence in 2015,” exposes the continued resort to state terror against the Tamil ethnic minority.

Detailed accounts from victims of torture and repression, which, the ITJP notes, “remain widespread and systematic,” refute claims that President Maithripala Sirisena’s regime, installed in a US regime change operation a year ago, is fighting for democracy and “good governance.”

Of particular significance is the stunning exposure of the complicity of Tamil nationalist groups that have emerged as key props of the Sirisena regime in Colombo. Several torture victims are supporters of either the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) or the Tamil National People’s Front (TNPF). These organizations, which are well aware of the Colombo regime’s ongoing resort to torture, including against their own members, are doing everything they can to cover it up.

Six of the victims reported that TNA parliamentarians and TNPF members are aware that they had been abducted by the security forces, having been informed by victims’ relatives. In four cases, they personally drove the victims to the airport, once they paid huge ransoms and were released, in order to get the victims out of the country and cover up their abuse at the hands of the government.

Witness 131 said, “I helped the TNA before the elections and during the presidential elections in January 2015 and the parliamentary election in August 2015. I gave out leaflets for them and told people to vote for them. I took part in campaigns and meetings. I

did this as a volunteer and was not paid. I worked with XX (Tamil politician, name withheld for witness protection purposes). He knows me.”

The TNA and TNPF refused to bring the victims to the public to expose the sinister character of the government that came out of the US-initiated “democratic revolution” in January 2015. They hastily sent the victims out of the country, using their connections in the security services, thereby making themselves complicit in the torture and rape that serves to terrorize the population.

This shows the social gulf separating the bourgeois forces in the Tamil nationalist parties from the masses of workers and oppressed people of all nationalities in Sri Lanka. Seeking to secure their positions in the Sri Lankan state and snap up business opportunities employing super-exploited Tamil workers for operations with imperialist finance capital, they are terrified of the masses. They therefore align themselves on the Colombo regime and cover up its outrages against the population.

Since Sirisena came to power in January 2015, 15 men and 5 women who left the country and presently live in three different countries gave detailed accounts of unlawful detention, repeated torture and sexual abuse at the hands of the security forces. Fifteen of the victims were abducted after the presidential elections last January, and five after the parliamentary elections in August. One of them was taken in a white van, a customary method under the previous regime.

From the testimonials, some are former child soldiers forcibly recruited by the Tamil-nationalist LTTE during the final phase of the Sri Lankan civil war, and who failed to surrender. Some are engaged in the election campaigns of the TNA and TNPF. Four of them participated in a protest of the relatives of the

disappeared during the visit of British Prime Minister David Cameron to Jaffna in 2013.

Victims reported the torture methods employed against them include beating, whipping, burning with cigarettes, branding with heated metal rods, water torture, asphyxiation in a plastic bag soaked in petrol or chili and tied around their necks, hanging upside down, beating on the soles of the feet and the use of electric currents through their body. Many were repeatedly raped during their detention.

Several excerpts from the testimonials are reproduced in the document reveals the chilling torture methods used by the Sri Lankan state.

Witness 158 states, "I was bleeding. I did not tell my wife that I was raped, only that I was detained and beaten. These are not things you can say to your wife. I have been suffering from mental health problems as a result of the torture I experienced in detention in Sri Lanka and from the sorrow of being separated from my wife and children and my homeland and way of life".

The ITJP was set up in 2013 and is administered by the Foundation for Human Rights in South Africa. It claims to have the largest collection of sworn witness statements of human rights abuses in Sri Lanka, and it declares its mission is "to secure justice for the victims of war crimes and post war crimes against humanity in Sri Lanka." Many of its members remain anonymous. Most are legal experts, prosecutors and investigators who worked in institutions like the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

Despite the ITJP's stated intention "to secure justice for the victims of war," the recommendations it proposes provide political cover to the Sirisena government, calling for it to reform its own security services and justice system. Its document claims that "ultimately the responsibility to identify, investigate and prosecute the perpetrators of these heinous crimes lies with the government of Sri Lanka."

In fact, the ITJP's report itself makes clear that the Sirisena government, having come to power a year ago, failed totally to fulfil its promises to bring about democracy. Violations of basic democratic rights continue, as the state relies on the ruthlessness of the army and allied police and paramilitary units to terrorize and oppress the working class and the broad masses.

The Sri Lankan capitalist class cannot reform itself to

bring about democracy: all its political representatives are implicated in torture and other crimes against the people. Most of the leaders of the Sirisena government and of the major opposition parties are directly responsible for the crimes perpetrated during the 30-year Sri Lankan civil war. Sirisena himself was acting defence minister during final phase of the war, when the military massacred thousands of fleeing civilians.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* warned one day before last year's presidential election, "Sirisena would be more ruthless than [his predecessor, Mahinda] Rajapakse towards minorities and towards the working class."

Contacted by the BBC, cabinet spokesman Rajitha Senaratne dismissed the allegations of torture in the ITJP document. He demanded, "If they have evidence please tell them to send it to us. We will investigate the case."



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