

UN chief praises pro-US Sri Lankan government

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During a three-day visit to Sri Lanka this month, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon lauded the current government, which is seeking to whitewash Colombo's war crimes with the help of UN, the US and India.

Ban travelled to the war-ravaged Northern Province, and visited several refugee camps, where thousands still live seven years after the country's protracted communal war ended in the military's defeat of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). At refugee camps he carried babies and showed a smiling face to war victims.

The UN chief first visited Sri Lanka on May 23, 2009, just five days after the LTTE's defeat. That visit occurred amid international outrage over the savage bombardment of LTTE-controlled areas in the north, which killed tens of thousands of civilians. At the end of the war, about 280,000 civilians were detained in military-run camps. Thousands of Tamil youth were dragged off to secret detention centres.

Back then, Ban declared he would ensure the investigation of human rights violations. Today, however, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), with his blessing, is supporting a domestic investigation that will enable the government to cover up the atrocities.

Washington supported the war and turned blind eye to former President Mahinda Rajapakse's anti-democratic rule. It began to criticise the war crimes only during the final days of the war. That was because China was emerging as the principal supplier of military hardware and funds to Colombo.

The bogus US-led human rights campaign culminated in a regime-change operation that ousted Rajapakse and installed Maithripala Sirisena as president in the election in January last year. United National Party (UNP) leader Ranil Wickremesinghe, who assisted

Washington's operation, became prime minister.

Ban hailed the "work" supposedly done by the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government. He said "there was some gap between expectations of the international community and the level of what the [Rajapakse] government had been doing." But "today the picture is very different" and it was "receiving recognition and appreciation [from the international community] unlike in the past."

The UN secretary general's remarks on the "progress" in North were aimed at hiding the miserable conditions of the people there. Thousands remain missing after the civil war ended, the North and East are still under military occupation, and many families are living in makeshift camps. Poverty has spread. Hundreds of political prisoners of all ethnicities have been held without trial for years.

Ban indirectly admitted that the UN did nothing to stop the wartime massacres, saying the body had made "serious mistakes" and "did not meet the expectations of the people and the world." Even after the war, "had we been more actively engaged, we could have saved much more, many more human lives."

Three years after the war ended, Ban, to deflect criticisms, appointed former senior UN official Charles Petrie to conduct an internal inquiry. It showed that the UN did nothing to prevent war crimes. That failure was not accidental, however. The UN only raised concerns after the US began to use the threat of "human rights" to pressure Rajapakse to distance himself from China.

Ban's recent visit also sought to bolster the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government, which is facing growing opposition from workers, youth and peasants, as well as campaigns by Tamils for justice for missing people and the return of land grabbed by the military.

In a speech in Galle, Ban urged young people to back

“reconciliation” and avoid conflict. His advice reflects the fear among the ruling elite about the potential social explosion among youth, who face unemployment, social deprivation and education cuts.

The UN head also praised the government for “many efforts taken to establish democracy and good governance,” including the 19th Constitutional Amendment and Right to Information Act. The constitutional amendment is a cosmetic change, reducing some powers of the executive president. The information act provides limited access to state documents, while entrenching broad areas that remain off-limits, such as any records relating to the country’s national security, diplomacy or economy.

Putting on a show of concern, Ban advised the government to reduce the military occupation in North and East and speed up the process to allow displaced people to return home.

Sirisena advised the media he had informed Ban that “he needed to move slowly as the country had come out of a long-drawn conflict.” Likewise, Ban told a press conference: “Reconciliation may take a longer time than one may expect.”

“Reconciliation” means a power-sharing agreement between the government and the Tamil capitalist parties, including the Tamil National Alliance (TNA). However, a section of the dominant Sinhala ruling elite is hostile to even limited power-sharing.

Moreover, the entire establishment is particularly sensitive to any war crimes investigation because successive governments and military leaders were responsible for the atrocities. Sirisena himself was a leading minister in Rajapakse’s cabinet before defecting to the US-backed camp.

During Ban’s visit, allies of Rajapakse and extremist Buddhist groups held protests in Colombo denouncing UN “interference” in Sri Lanka. Sirisena and Wickremesinghe are also seeking to appease these elements, as well as the military.

Ban was welcomed by TNA leaders, including Northern Provincial Council Chief Minister C.V. Wigneswaran. The UN visit was another occasion for TNA leaders to claim to be working to alleviate the dire conditions of the Tamil masses and to justify their backing for the government and the US.

No genuine investigation into the war crimes can be expected from the UN, which is a lackey for the US and

other major imperialist powers, or the ruling classes in Sri Lanka—Sinhala and Tamil alike. The democratic rights of the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers and poor can be established only as part of the fight for an international socialist program.



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