

US prompts new “human rights” resolution to push Sri Lanka to line up against China

Pradeep Ramanayake, K. Ratnayake
18 January 2021

According to Colombo media reports, a “Core Group on Sri Lanka” is planning to present a new resolution to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on human rights issues. This group includes Britain, Canada, Germany, North Macedonia and Montenegro.

By all indications Washington is behind the move intended to press Sri Lankan President Gotabhaya Rajapakse’s government to break from China’s “influence.”

Although political turmoil is engulfing Washington amid President Donald Trump’s fascist coup attempt, the US military buildup against China is continuing. The US wants to integrate Sri Lanka into its war preparations.

The resolution will be submitted to the UNHRC’s 46th session, to be held in Geneva in March. The *Sunday Times* reported in its weekend issue that the Colombo government turned down a request by the Core Group to co-sponsor the new resolution.

The resolution’s content is yet unknown. But the US, backed by other imperialist powers, hypocritically exploited the war crimes committed during the final phase of the war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to press Colombo to line up behind it.

A nearly 30-year bloody communal war against the LTTE ended in May 2009 during former President Mahinda Rajapakse’s government. His younger brother, Gotabhaya Rajapakse, now president, supervised the brutal military operations as defence secretary.

UN expert committees estimated that the military was responsible for at least 40,000 civilian deaths in the final weeks of war, as well as the killing of several LTTE leaders and the disappearance of hundreds of others who surrendered at the end of war.

Washington supported the war and the anti-democratic Mahinda Rajapakse regime. However, hostile to his close ties with China, which supplied military hardware and

financial assistance, the US sponsored several UNHRC resolutions to push him to distance his government from Beijing.

Finally, Washington orchestrated a regime-change operation to oust Mahinda Rajapakse and replace him with the pro-US Maithripala Sirisena as president via elections in January 2015.

Sirisena shifted the country’s foreign policy in favour of the US. In return, Washington helped Colombo to dilute the war crimes investigation demands and to pass a UNHRC resolution in October 2015 calling for the creation of domestic “hybrid courts” to investigate human rights. Such courts were never established.

Last March the current Rajapakse government withdrew its support for this resolution and other related UNHRC resolutions. Rajapakse’s government denies that any war crimes were committed and defends the military. The same position is taken by all political parties in Colombo that supported the prosecution of the war.

Amid a deep economic crisis, Rajapakse is appointing retired and serving generals to key administration posts, rapidly entrenching an autocratic regime based on the military.

Washington approached the Tamil parties to tap their support for a new UNHRC resolution, even as the Trump administration withdrew from the UNHRC objecting to its criticism of Israel human rights violations.

In mid-December the US ambassador in Colombo Alaina Teplitz met with Tamil National Alliance (TNA) spokesman and parliamentarian M.A. Sumanthiran, who assured Teplitz of his party’s backing.

Sumanthiran later met with Tamil Peoples Alliance (TPA) leader and former Northern Provincial Council Chief Minister C.V. Wigneswaran and Tamil National Peoples Front (TNPF) leader Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam. According to the media, they agreed to prepare a proposal for the UNHRC.

US and UK diplomats also held telephone conversations with Ponnambalam, while British High Commissioner Sarah Halton had a separate discussion with Sumanthiran in December.

These utterly corrupt bourgeois Tamil nationalist parties have long backed US geopolitical interests, particularly against China, and in turn sought the backing of the imperialist powers and India to secure their privileges.

They have no genuine interest in war crimes investigations or the democratic rights of Tamil workers and poor. The TNA played a key role in the US-sponsored regime-change operation in 2015. Sumanthiran then helped to formulate the October 2015 UNHRC resolution, which suppressed the war crimes investigation in collusion with the US State Department.

Last week, after the behind-the-scenes manoeuvres with the US and UK diplomats, the TNA, TNPF and TPA leaders and other Tamil figures wrote a letter to UNHRC member states requesting a new resolution. The letter urges the UNHRC to ask UN bodies, including the Security Council and General Assembly, to “inquire into the crime of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity,” via the International Criminal Court and “any other appropriate and effective international accountability mechanisms.”

The letter also asks the UNHRC president to refer “matters on accountability in Sri Lanka back to the UN Secretary General for action as stated above” and mandate “the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to continue to monitor Sri Lanka for ongoing violations.”

The letter requests the setting up of an “International Independent Investigation Mechanism” like that invoked against Syria. This means that the Tamil parties are backing the US-led aggressive actions against Syria aimed at regime change.

As part of their perfidious role, these Tamil parties only pay lip service to the continued fight of Tamil people for human rights investigations, information about the disappeared and the release of Tamil political prisoners. They never demand the withdrawal of the military occupation of the island’s north and east.

The Rajapakse government is facing an unprecedented economic downturn caused by the impact of the global pandemic. According to the Central Bank, economic output dropped by 3.9 percent last year. Facing massive foreign debt repayments over the next four years, including \$US6 billion this year, the government has turned to Beijing to finance its cash deficits.

Beijing, confronted by the US military buildup and provocations, is keen to develop its influence by providing loans and grants to Colombo. This is part of its drive to develop its relations in other countries in the region.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo visited Sri Lanka in October to demand that Colombo line up with the US. At a press conference, he declared: “We see from bad deals, violations of sovereignty and lawlessness on land and sea, that the Chinese Communist Party is a predator.”

A bill presented to the US Congress on December 21 on financial support to countries hit by the pandemic stated: “US financial support will be contingent on Sri Lanka asserting its sovereignty against influence by the People’s Republic of China.”

In another warning, Washington last month discontinued a 49 billion rupee (\$480 million) US Millennium Challenge Corporation grant “due to lack of partner country engagement.”

India, one of the United States’ main strategic partners against China, sent its foreign affairs minister S. Jaishankar to Colombo this month, primarily to express displeasure over the Rajapakse regime’s growing relations with Beijing.

A genuine investigation into the war crimes and the ending of discrimination against the Tamil and Muslim minorities in Sri Lanka can be achieved only through the united struggle of the working class, across ethnic lines, on the basis of an international socialist program against the Rajapakse regime.

This struggle is bound up with the fight against the imperialist war preparations. The latest US actions to line up Sri Lanka show the advanced stage of its geostrategic aggression against China, posing the danger of catastrophic wars.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact