

Tamil parties in Sri Lanka support US-backed ‘human rights’ resolution

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Tamil nationalist parties in Sri Lanka have been campaigning to “strengthen” a war crimes resolution being presented by the “Core Group on Sri Lanka” to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) currently meeting in Geneva.

The resolution, which passed yesterday, was promoted behind the scenes by the US, with support from the UK and the Sri Lankan Tamil parties, and also calls for reversal of Sri Lanka’s anti-democratic laws. The Core Group is made of representatives from the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Northern Macedonia, Montenegro and Malawi.

US, UK, German and Canadian posturing over human rights is a patent fraud. These imperialist powers, which have engaged in neo-colonial interventions and are responsible for war crimes in the last three decades, are not concerned in the slightest about Colombo’s war crimes or attacks on democratic rights. Washington’s primary aim is to ensure that strategically-located Sri Lanka breaks relations with Beijing and remains actively engaged in US war preparations against China.

Like its predecessors, the government of President Gotabhaya Rajapakse denies that any war crimes were committed by the military during Colombo’s war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The government, which is heavily dependent on the military as a bulwark against the rising social opposition of workers and the poor, wants immunity for all those accused of war crimes. It was desperately appealing for support from other UNHCR members to defeat the Core Group resolution.

Several of Sri Lanka’s bourgeois Tamil parties have called for the Core Group resolution to include a proposal that Sri Lanka be referred to the International Criminal Court (ICC) as suggested in UNHR Commissioner General Michelle Bachelet’s report last month.

Bachelet’s report listed some of the war crimes

committed by the military under former President Mahinda Rajapakse, the current prime minister, and his brother, Gotabhaya Rajapakse, then defence secretary and now president. According to the UN, over 40,000 Tamil civilians were killed in the final months of the three-decade war against the LTTE in 2009. Hundreds of young Tamils who surrendered to the army have simply disappeared.

The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) fully backs the Core Group resolution, while the Tamil National People’s Front (TNPf) and the Tamil People’s Alliance (TPA) claim it is not strong enough and call for Sri Lanka to be referred to the ICC.

Responding to these criticisms, TNA spokesman and parliamentarian M.A. Sumanthiran told a north Jaffna meeting on March 8 that the resolution “should be prepared in such a way that it wins the support of member countries, [and] to keep Sri Lanka under supervision for the next two years.” A harsher resolution, he added, would be an obstacle to gaining the support. “The UNHRC doesn’t have the power to hand Sri Lanka over to the ICC,” he said.

TNPf leader Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam wrote to Core Group envoys, expressing his “disappointment.” He declared the resolution did not “meet the basic expectations of the Tamil victims, especially in relation to international accountability for grave violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law.”

Ponnambalam slammed the TNA for backing the resolution and said his party would no longer co-operate with that organisation.

TPA leader C.V. Wigneswaran declared that a diluted resolution would deceive the Tamil people and called for the “international community” to adopt a human rights-based approach, rather than a political approach.

These “differences” are purely tactical. The Tamil parties all appeal for support from the imperialist powers

and have no fundamental opposition to Washington's underlying war drive against China.

The TNA calculates that the UNHRC resolution will isolate Colombo, forcing it into line with US demands and thus benefit the Tamil elite. The equally cynical calculations of Ponnambalam and Wigneswaran for a so-called strong resolution is an attempt to deflect the seething anger of the Tamil masses over the war crimes and to exert greater pressure on the Rajapakse regime to grant some concessions.

These parties all responded to Washington's backroom moves for a UNHCR resolution. In mid-December, Aliana Teplitz, the US ambassador in Colombo, held discussions with Sumanthiran who gave his party's backing. According to the media, Sumanthiran then met with Ponnambalam and Wigneswaran who agreed on a push for a new resolution.

On January 15, the TNA, TNPF, TPA and civil society groups wrote to UNHRC members formally requesting a new resolution. The letter called on the UNHRC to request 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 called for the establishment of an "International Independent Investigation Mechanism" similar to that used against the Assad regime Syria which was accompanied by US-led military operations.

In February, these parties backed the North East Civil Society Forum march from Potuvil in the East to Polkandy in the North of Sri Lanka which sent a memorandum along the same lines as the above letter to the UNHRC.

Over the past three weeks, the Federation of Tamil Civil Society Organisations, led by the Hindu and Catholic clergy, has conducted a hunger protest campaign and a march in Jaffna. University students have also been mobilised to demand Sri Lanka be brought before the ICC.

That the US-backed Core Group resolution does not call for Sri Lanka to be referred to the ICC is no accident. Washington is only interested in pressuring Colombo to distance itself from Beijing. This, of course, does not mean that US will not try to invoke the ICC if necessary.

Concerned about the relations of the previous government of President Mahinda Rajapakse with Beijing, Washington sponsored several resolutions to pressure Colombo to break those ties. When that failed,

the Obama administration orchestrated a regime-change operation to oust Mahinda Rajapakse and elevate Maithripala Sirisena into the presidency.

Sirisena and his prime minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, integrated the Sri Lankan military closely with the US Pacific Command and its operations against China. The Tamil parties, and the TNA in particular, backed the regime change and became de facto partners of the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe administration.

The US responded by supporting the new regime in Colombo and moved a resolution in October 2015 that proposed a "domestic investigation" into human rights violations committed during the war. In other words, it allowed the government to suppress any genuine investigation in Sri Lankan war crimes. The TNA was fully involved in the preparation of that resolution.

The return to power of another Rajapakse administration and the strengthening of its economic relations with Beijing has antagonized Washington and its regional ally India. Reeling from the crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, Colombo remains heavily dependent economically on Chinese investment and aid.

Washington, under the previous Trump administration and now under President Biden, has sent numerous signals to Colombo to fall into line with the US geopolitical agenda. If Colombo does not heed these directives, the US will not hesitate to orchestrate another regime change operation.

The manoeuvres of these utterly corrupt Tamil bourgeois parties are a dangerous endorsement of a future catastrophic US-led war against China. Acting as quislings of US imperialism, these parties have little interest in a serious investigation into Colombo's war crimes or establishing the democratic rights of the Tamil masses.

A genuine investigation into war crimes and an end to the decades of state discrimination against Tamil and Muslim minorities can only be achieved through a united struggle of the working class in Sri Lanka and South Asia.



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