

Sri Lankan government proposes phony Truth and Reconciliation Commission

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Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath told parliament on March 15 that he had informed the UN Human Rights Council last month that his government will establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Herath claimed this would address the ongoing problems since the end of Colombo's war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in May 2009, and help to establish "national unity."

Herath was updating parliament about his online address to the 58th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva on February 25. The session was discussing a resolution passed in 2022 and subsequently extended. The UNHRC resolution mandated the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to establish an office to collect evidence on wartime abuses in Sri Lanka. It also called for member states to take appropriate action over Sri Lanka's human rights violations.

The resolution was sponsored by the US, with backing from the UK, France, Montenegro, Malawi and North Macedonia. Former US President Joe Biden had restored the country's membership in the UNHRC, a membership previously withdrawn by President Trump during his first term. The new Trump administration has again withdrawn the US from the UNHRC.

Herath told the UNHRC session that the Sri Lankan government "will ensure that domestic mechanisms," including a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), will be established to achieve "national unity." He also stated that his Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/National People's Power (JVP/NPP) government would strengthen the Office of Missing Persons (OMP), the Office for Reparations, and the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR), bodies created by previous Sri Lankan administrations.

Herath's statement to the UNHRC and parliament are yet another attempt by the JVP/NPP administration to

hoodwink the masses, including the Tamil people in the North and East of the country, who were the primary victims of the 26-year war.

The real purpose of latest manoeuvre proposed by the JVP/NPP is to cover up the war crimes committed by the Sri Lankan military during its bloody conflict with the LTTE. At least 40,000 Tamil civilians were killed by the Sri Lankan military during the last months of the war, according to UN estimates. Thousands of those who gave themselves up to the army in the final days were "disappeared" and several surrendering LTTE leaders murdered. About 300,000 civilians were detained in military-controlled camps in Vavuniya for months.

Herath told parliament that the JVP had called on then President Mahinda Rajapakse just after the war to establish a mechanism to rebuild the country and establish a TRC. "If we had implemented these proposals, this 51/4 resolution would not have been passed [in 2022]," he said.

These claims are false and a deliberate attempt to cover-up the JVP's full support for the communal war—from its inception in 1983 and throughout its final years, particularly from 2005 in direct alignment with then President Mahinda Rajapakse, and during the 2009 carnage.

The JVP, which was politically responsible for the devastation unleashed against the Tamil population, presented some "rebuilding the country" proposals to Rajapakse, but only after the war. Like other Sri Lankan capitalist parties, this was not out of any opposition to communalism but to reap "peace dividends" from the bloody conflict.

Herath's claim that the US and other countries would not have initiated resolutions on Sri Lankan human rights violation is an attempt to cover-up the motivations of the major powers.

The resolutions initiated by the imperialist countries against Sri Lanka since 2011 had nothing to do with defending human rights. The US and other major powers supported Colombo's communalist war against the Tamil minority from the outset, but Washington was particularly concerned about Sri Lanka's developing ties with China, including for financial assistance and military hardware.

The US, as part of its political and military buildup against China, began pressuring the Rajapakse regime to distance itself from Beijing. When this tactic failed, Washington orchestrated a regime-change operation to oust Rajapakse in 2015, replacing him with Maithripala Sirisena. The JVP leaders, including President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and Herath, fully backed the regime-change operation.

Herath told parliament that the judiciary was independent, and the rule of law would be upheld under the new JVP/NPP regime. We have promised national reconciliation, Herath declared. President Dissanayake "has insisted he will not allow racism to raise its head" and the OMP and ONUR will be strengthened, he said, while urging the Tamil bourgeois nationalist parties to trust the government and support it.

The ONUR was established in April 2015 and the OMP in September 2017. The ONUR launched a newsletter proclaiming, "No to extremism, No to violence." This slogan, in fact, was directed against Tamils, as if they were responsible for "extremism and violence."

While the OMP collected some statistics about families whose loved one were missing and proposed some compensation, the real purpose of these entities was to let the Sri Lankan military war criminals off the hook.

The TRC is designed for the same purpose. This mechanism, it is claimed, will help to find those who were responsible for war crimes and other abuses. But those brought before it will make limited confessions and then be forgiven as part of reconciliation!

Minister of Buddhasasana, Religious and Cultural Affairs Hiniiduma Sunil Senevi, told the parliament last week that Sri Lanka needed a TRC to "move forward with a commitment to forgive one another."

Like all previous regimes, the JVP/NPP government opposes any war crimes probe, repeatedly insisting that there were no crimes committed by the military and defending it to the hilt. And like other Sri Lankan governments, it depends on the military to defend the capitalist rule. In fact, the JVP/NPP formed the "Three Armed Forces Collective" as one of its main election platforms. Its members include majors and other senior

officers who led the communal war.

The JVP's opposition to a war crimes probe is directly connected to its political foundations in Sinhala chauvinist politics. On September 18, 2024, just three days before the presidential election last year, the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress summoned all political candidates, or their representatives, to a meeting to question them on their attitude towards Buddhism, the Sinhala language and the unitary state.

Herath, who attended that meeting on behalf of Dissanayake, declared: "Article 9 of our constitution will not be changed in any manner... article 9 says 'the republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place.' We will implement that in future as well..."

"We are a political movement that has made immense sacrifices for the country's unitary state, territorial integrity and national security. Therefore, yesterday, today and tomorrow, our stance remains the same."

The Tamil masses who are still suffering from the war devastation, and those families who lost their loved ones, will not achieve justice through the Colombo government or the imperialist powers. The Tamil nationalist parties are not interested in the plight of the workers and the poor but in how best to advance their own privileges through the devolution of political power to the North and the East.

The democratic rights of the Tamil masses, the withdrawal of the military from the North and East and justice over the war crimes, will only be achieved as part of a broader struggle against the capitalist profit system. This requires the development of unified action by Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim workers in the fight for a Sri Lanka-Eelam Socialist Republic as part of a Federation of Socialist Republics in South Asia and internationally. This is the program on which the Socialist Equality Party fights.



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