

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

46th Regular Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council

Item 2: Interactive Dialogue on the OHCHR Report on Sri Lanka (as per Res. 30/1 and 40/1)

Oral statement delivered by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)

Wednesday, 24 February 2021

Thank you, Madame President and High Commissioner.

The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) shares the concerns on the disquieting human rights situation in Sri Lanka which were raised in the High Commissioner's report, the joint assessment by the Special Procedure mandate holders and civil society groups.

Over the last year, a major roll back on international obligations as well meaningful steps towards ensuring accountability, reconciliation and the rule of law has been noted in Sri Lanka. This was most visibly seen in its unilateral withdrawal from Res. 30/1, together with obstruction of existing transitional justice and accountability measures.

The new national measures and *ad-hoc* commission to review the findings of previous commissions appears to have undone the limited steps towards accountability. Over a decade after the conflict, successive domestic processes have failed victims and their families, denoting both the inability and unwillingness of the Government to address past violations and deep-rooted impunity.

This lack of acknowledgement of past abuse, increased militarization of the former conflict zones, dilution of constitutional safeguards, intimidation / reprisals against civil society, hostile and exclusionary discourse against ethno-religious minorities, are indicative of a growing pattern and significant risk of further violations.

We underline the preventive mandate of the Council highlighted in the High Commissioner's report, which was also discussed in 2009. In keeping with its own consensus, the Council must remain prepared to prevent future violations along with promoting and protecting human rights around the world. There is a need for principled international action on the issue as transitional justice and accountability for past violations are integral to lasting peace, reconciliation and development.

We therefore join the High Commissioner and Special Procedures and call on the Council to pass a robust resolution outlining the necessary international action on the issue, including strengthened monitoring by the OHCHR; creation of an international independent investigative mechanism to collect and preserve evidence of past and ongoing human rights abuses; pursuit of alternative accountability avenues; and other collective action manifesting the Council's commitment to secure justice for the victims, survivors and their families.

Thank you.