

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

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Organization: Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada
Item: Item 3 – General Debate
Date: 9 March 2018
Speaker: Ms. Dharsha Jegatheeswaran

Oral Statement to the 37th Session of the UN Human Rights Council from Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC), NGO in special consultative status

Mr. President:

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada thanks the High Commissioner for Human Rights for his work promoting, protecting and speaking out for human rights despite a global trend in the opposite direction. We take this opportunity to highlight our concerns about the lack of accountability and justice in Sri Lanka.

Despite almost 10 years having passed since the end of the war in Sri Lanka, there has been absolutely no progress on accountability and justice for past human rights atrocities and very little progress on preventing and remedying current violations including torture. The on-going impunity for atrocity crimes leads, as the High Commissioner stated in his report on Sri Lanka, to cycles of violence every 10 years, the next instance of which very worryingly appears to be beginning with organized attacks by extremist anti-Muslim mobs this past month.

Families of the Disappeared across the North-East of Sri Lanka have now been protesting for over a year in horrid conditions. The government's failure to address these families' demands to release names of surrendeers, detainees and secret detention centres, is emblematic of the government's overall lack of political will to meaningfully pursue truth and justice. Instead, the government claims to be pursuing remedies through an Office of Missing Persons that lacks both the trust of victim communities, and the capacity to function effectively without a concurrent independent judicial mechanism.

Given the government's clear lack of political will for justice, we join the High Commissioner for Human Rights in calling on member States to pursue the avenue of universal jurisdiction to hold accountable those responsible for atrocity crimes during and after the armed conflict. Only accountability and justice can end the culture of impunity in Sri Lanka that has led to recurrent conflict over the last 70 years.