



Human Rights
Institute

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada
Item 2: General debate
7 September 2026
Speaker: Harini Sivalingam

Oral Statement to the 63rd Session of the UN Human Rights Council from Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC) and the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute, NGOs in special consultative status

Sri Lanka must be held accountable for mass graves in Chemmani

Mr. President,

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada and the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute note with grave concern that the OHCHR report¹ on reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka demonstrates the continued lack of meaningful progress toward justice and accountability for the survivors of atrocity crimes committed in Sri Lanka.

The ongoing excavation of the Chemmani mass grave site underscores the urgency for credible investigations and accountability. To date 583 skeletal remains have been uncovered, including those of infants and children.

During a visit to the site in June 2025, the High Commissioner for Human Rights emphasized the need for transparent and robust investigations by independent forensic experts. International human rights organizations have urged Sri Lanka to comply with international standards, including the Minnesota Protocol, involve independent international forensic observers, and ensure a victim-centred excavation process.

Yet, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka² has documented continued surveillance, intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders and family members monitoring the excavation.

We deplore Sri Lanka's lack of demonstrable commitment to justice despite the Accountability Project and other Council resolutions. We call on the High Commissioner and this Council to urge the Government of Sri Lanka to fully cooperate with the Project and facilitate the collection and preservation of evidence for potential criminal proceedings before domestic, foreign, or international courts.

Thank you.

¹ Progress in reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka - Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, A/HRC/63/18.

² Report on the ongoing investigation into the mass grave site in Chemmani, Jaffna. Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (September 2025), <https://www.hrcsl.lk/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Fact-Finding-Report-of-HRCSL-on-Chemmani-Mass-Grave-Site.pdf>