

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

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

Item 2 - Interactive Dialogue with High Commissioner

Lawyers Rights Watch Canada

March 4, 2013

Speaker: Vani Selvarajah

Thank you Mr. President,

Madam High Commissioner, on behalf of Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada and the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR), we welcome your annual report, and thank you for your continued resolve to protect human rights around the world.

The situation in Sri Lanka is deteriorating, with an increased level of militarization, suppression of free speech, the breakdown of the rule of law and the loss of any democratic space. The Tamil people are living under army occupation. Students from the University of Jaffna were illegally arrested and detained for peacefully protesting. Journalists continue to live and work in fear of reprisals. The Chief Justice, Shirane Bandaranayake, was illegally impeached this January.

We are encouraged by your optimism that findings of the Secretary General's landmark internal review undertaken by Charles Petrie, would allow for increased responsibility, transparency and accountability within the UN system. To effectively promote accountability in Sri Lanka, Council itself must act to ensure acceptance of the UN Panel of Experts Report as an official document. The Panel of Experts concluded that there were credible allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by both sides of the conflict in Sri Lanka.

We are deeply concerned by the continued attacks on your credibility, impartiality and neutrality. Human Rights defenders in Sri Lanka, and elsewhere continue to be the subject of attacks meant to silence calls for adherence to international human rights norms. We encourage you to continue to advocate for the cessation of systemic human rights abuses in Sri Lanka and to call for remediation of past violations.

Just last week, new evidence has surfaced where a 12 year old boy, Balachandran Prabakaran, was summarily executed while in Sri Lankan army custody on the last days of the war in 2009. These and other violations of international law, including war crimes and crimes against humanity, must be investigated by a neutral party.

Madam High Commissioner, we look forward to your report to Council wherein you reiterate your call for a Commission of Inquiry in Sri Lanka, in order that the senseless slaughter of a child and other crimes are addressed.

Thank you.

*Check against delivery.