

# Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

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

[www.lrwc.org](http://www.lrwc.org); [lrwc@portal.ca](mailto:lrwc@portal.ca); Tel: +1 604 738 0338; Fax: +1 604 736 1175

3220 West 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Vancouver, B.C. CANADA V6K 2V5

Date: September 26, 2013

Agenda Item 2&10 General Debate

Speaker: Ms. Vani Selvarajah

*Check Against Delivery*

Thank you Mr. President,

Lawyers Rights Watch Canada wishes to thank Madam High Commissioner Pillay for her oral report on her recent visit to Sri Lanka. She has correctly pointed out the alarming intervention of the military in the daily lives of civilians in the North and East.

The interference of the military in the Northern Provincial election in Sri Lanka this past Saturday is one case in point. The military's interference in the election offers compelling evidence of the government's endless oppression of Tamils. Uniformed and non-uniformed members of the military reportedly attacked Tamil candidates and their supporters, including in a midnight raid against the lone female candidate, Ananthi Sasitharan. She and her daughters had already fled, but her supporters and an election monitor were brutally beaten by uniformed Army personnel. An earlier attack in Mullaitivu resulted in the death of a Tamil campaigner.

Despite the violence and harassment, the Tamil National Alliance was elected with an overwhelming mandate by the people in the North - a reflection of the sheer frustration with the current status quo. The TNA has long called for full-scale demilitarization from the Northern Province, to enable Tamils now living under the shadow of the gun, to experience at least some semblance of normalcy.

Military presence in the daily lives of the Tamil people continues to obstruct the path to peace. The pervasive militarization exacerbates the "legacy of massive trauma" inflicted against the Tamil population. This has left victims in desperate need for psychological support services. Unfortunately, and despite the Government's claims, trauma counselling to victims has been essentially prohibited.

It has been four and a half years since the end of the armed conflict, and there is absolutely no justification for the omnipresence of the military, which includes one soldier for every four Tamils.

We therefore call upon the government of Sri Lanka to fully withdraw its military from the North and East of Sri Lanka, in order to ensure the restoration of normalcy for the war affected people. Withdrawal of the military should be immediate, unconditional, and complete and should take place by December 31, 2013 —in time for the international community to properly address Sri Lanka's human rights record at the upcoming March Session.

Given the self-perpetuating nature of impunity, we echo the High Commissioner's call for an **independent international investigation** into Sri Lanka's war crimes and crimes against humanity. Only then, Mr. President, can one hope for justice on an island bloodied by decades of brutality.

Thank you.