



**Press Statement in Response to Sri Lankan President's Remarks in BBC Interview:
Sri Lanka President wants 'internal' war crimes court.**

22nd January 2016.

Johannesburg: The International Truth and Justice Project is deeply concerned that Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena appears to be rolling back on his commitment in Geneva to include international involvement in a future judicial mechanism¹. In an interview with the BBC yesterday, the President reportedly stated, "I will never agree to international involvement in this matter".

This flies in the face of the recommendation of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights that Sri Lankan establish "an ad hoc hybrid special court, integrating international judges, prosecutors, lawyers and investigators"². High Commissioner Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, who is due to visit Sri Lanka shortly, has been very clear about the "total failure of domestic mechanisms to conduct credible investigations" in Sri Lanka³.

"The High Commissioner is right: international involvement is essential for victims and witnesses to have trust in the justice process because Sri Lanka has such a long history of failed domestic processes," said ITJP Executive Director Yasmin Sooka.

ITJP is also shocked that the Sri Lankan President should question that crimes took place after the detailed and graphic revelations of the year-long OHCHR Investigation, as well as reports by many other credible international and Sri Lankan organisations. We note the BBC reported that President Sirisena said, "it was important to determine whether such crimes actually took place".

"This is an insult to the thousands of victims and witnesses who testified to the UN inquiry and other bodies," said Yasmin Sooka, adding, "it's rather late in the day to question whether crimes took place".

President Sirisena also suggested in his BBC interview that because the UN did not specify names of alleged perpetrators, there was some doubt about the allegations.

"Just because the UN decided from the outset not to mention names of alleged perpetrators does not mean they do not have such information. It is usual for an UN inquiry not to disclose the names but to hand this over to a credible prosecutorial body when established. Quite frankly enough evidence exists already for a tribunal, if it's run in a way that protects witnesses," said Ms. Sooka.

¹ The UN Resolution co-sponsored by Sri Lanka in Geneva in September 2015 said it: "further affirms in this regard the importance of participation in a Sri Lankan judicial mechanism, including the Special Counsel's office, of Commonwealth and other foreign judges, defence lawyers, and authorized prosecutors and investigators".

² Statement by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein via videolink to the Human Rights Council, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16539&LangID=E#sthash.mSysihc.dpuf>

³ Ibid.



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President Sirisena also dismissed reports that the Sri Lankan security forces have continued to abduct, torture and sexually violate Tamil detainees during his period in office. He said such reports came from people “close to the Tamil Tigers”.

ITJP documented twenty such cases that occurred in 2015, while [Freedom From Torture](#) has an additional 7 cases that do not overlap.

“It is disappointing to see the new President defame all those who allege there are still ongoing violations as linked to the LTTE”, said Ms. Sooka, “this is the sort of rhetoric and denial we’d hoped would change.”

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ITJP is a South African based project investigating allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Sri Lanka. For more information and our January 2016 report on ongoing violations please see our website www.itjpsl.com.