

INTERNATIONAL
TRUTH
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PROJECT

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Press Release: Target the perpetrators not the victims

Johannesburg: The ITJP calls on the Government of Sri Lanka to suspend public officials, including security officials, accused of involvement in torture and enforced disappearances by past commissions of inquiry and UN reports. These should include inter alia:

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:
YASMIN SOOKA

- hundreds of alleged perpetrators named by the three [Zonal Disappearance Commissions and the All Island Commission some of whom are now in senior positions](#),
- those who commanded units involved in violations named in the OHCHR ([OISL](#)) report,
- alleged perpetrators named in the reports of UN special mandate holders,
- intelligence director, [Mr Sisira Mendis](#), who ran the “4th Floor” CID site notorious for torture and
- [General Jagath Jayasuriya](#) who is currently Ambassador to Brazil but who ran the Vanni Security Force Headquarters, commonly known as “Joseph Camp”, where torture was rife.

The Government of Sri Lanka should move to establish an independent investigation into those alleged to be responsible for these crimes. Their career files should be made publicly available in order to investigate and track their involvement at other sites of torture, including, if they have been promoted, whether there are links between their promotions and their involvement in these crimes.

“If the Government of Sri Lanka is serious about its ‘zero tolerance policy for torture’, it should start by taking action against perpetrators, rather than constantly asking us for the names of victims it cannot protect,” said the ITJP’s Executive Director, Yasmin Sooka.

In a prepared oral statement at the launch of the ITJP's latest [report](#) on torture in "Joseph Camp" in Geneva, Sri Lanka's Permanent Representative, Ravinatha Aryasinghe, asked the ITJP confidentially to share information about torture cases with his Government, or the national Human Right Commission, to enable them to investigate. The same request was made to ITJP in 2016 in a letter from the Foreign Minister, Mangala Samaraweera. Ms Sooka replied to that letter offering to assist by proposing names of international experts to set up an independent investigative unit. Ms. Sooka received no response. She reiterated that offer to Ambassador Aryasinghe this week. In January 2017 the chairperson of the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission wrote to the ITJP also asking for information on torture cases and Ms. Sooka responded the same day, inviting her for discussions, but never received any response.

"So long as Sri Lanka has no credible witness protection system there is no way any organisation can responsibly share information that identifies victims - whether they are inside or outside the country," said Ms. Sooka. *"Today we are receiving worrying complaints from Tamil human rights defenders that they and their families are being threatened by the security forces for speaking out about the Geneva process; this is completely unacceptable".*

Nevertheless the ITJP is happy to share the profiles of alleged perpetrators and looks forward to the Government beginning to take active measures to investigate their roles in torture, sexual violence and unlawful detentions.

Media reports from Colombo indicate the Foreign Minister, Mangala Samaraweera, may have extended an invitation to the ITJP to visit Sri Lanka and inspect detention sites.

"With continuing surveillance and harassment of activists and victims in the north and east, the ITJP cannot currently accept this offer because it would put all the witnesses it interviewed in danger," said Ms Sooka, *"but of course we look forward to the day when we can freely conduct our investigative work inside the country".*

A recent ITJP report, [Putting the Wolf to Guard the Sheep](#), raised concerns about alleged perpetrators, including one named in a UN report, sitting on the very body that purportedly implements witness protection. The ITJP notes the Government has taken no remedial action since this information being brought to its attention.

Ambassador Aryasinghe stated in Geneva that his Government had investigated allegations of secret torture camps but found there were none at present. However he did not comment on the use of "Joseph Camp", as a place of illegal detention and torture over many decades, including under the current government. Nor did he give details of the methodology of the government's investigation into the secret sites, or why there have been no criminal proceedings resulting from this investigation if the government believes they existed in the past.

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