

INTERNATIONAL
TRUTH
AND JUSTICE
PROJECT

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Press Release: Suspend Deployment of Sri Lankan Peacekeepers.

Johannesburg:The United Nations Peacekeeping department should suspend all deployments from Sri Lanka following the latest report of the UN human rights body which warns that the independence and credibility of the body tasked with vetting the troops had been fundamentally eroded¹.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:
YASMIN SOOKA

“The UN Department of Peace Operations has a legal duty to ensure due diligence before deploying troops,” said the Executive Director of the International Truth and Justice Project, Yasmin Sooka. *“The report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights confirms that New York is not in a position now to certify that the Sri Lankan troops have been properly vetted and screened and must urgently take steps to move the screening process back to Geneva.”*

Under the current arrangement the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka carries out the vetting of troops in Colombo. As Michelle Bachelet has pointed out, the Human Rights Commission has been politicized and its independence undermined by the appointment of a former government Minister as its chairperson.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michele Bachelet, also said she was particularly troubled by the appointment of two men alleged by the UN to be implicated in war crimes to head the Sri Lankan Army and run the Defence Ministry. The appointment of Shavendra Silva to Army Commander in 2019 triggered the UN’s announcement that it was suspending deployment of all Sri Lankan peacekeepers, except where operations could be endangered².The UN later clarified that its suspension would affect

¹ A/HRC/46/20.

² <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/9/25/sri-lankan-troops-barred-from-un-peacekeeping-over-new-army-chief>

Also A/HRC/46/20 §23.

The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations said it would suspend future Sri Lankan army deployments, “except where suspension would expose UN operations to serious operational risk”.

a quarter of Sri Lankan peacekeepers - namely those deployed in Lebanon who would be replaced by troops from other countries³.

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In addition, departing Sri Lankan contingents were photographed repeatedly saluting an alleged war criminal, Shavendra Silva, at farewell parades⁴. This is in spite of the widespread international criticism of the appointment of Shavendra Silva to Army Commander in 2019⁵. A group of UN experts called the appointment of Shavendra Silva⁶ an affront to his victims and a move that defied understanding. This view was echoed by the US Government⁷, Canada⁸ and the European Union⁹.

Later in February 2020, the US Government made public its designation of Shavendra Silva and his family for alleged gross violations of human rights¹⁰. Shavendra Silva was subsequently given the additional responsibility of acting Chief of Defence Staff - the top most military position - and was recently promoted to the rank of four star General¹¹.

"It's time for UN Peacekeeping to show the Government of Sri Lanka that there are consequences for its promotion of alleged war criminals, in line with the Secretary General's principled stance on human rights and justice in Sri Lanka¹²," said Ms. Sooka. *"Peacekeeping jobs are a privilege not a right and the latest OHCHR report makes it clear the country is not delivering on its commitments to the UN Human Rights Council."*

ends

³ <https://www.un.int/srilanka/news/foreign-secretary-aryasinha-discusses-obstacles-placed-sri-lanka's-peacekeeping-contribution-un>

⁴ <https://www.army.lk/news/mali-bound-next-ccc-salutes-commander-army>

6 November 2019 - Mali bound

<https://alt.army.lk/vir/content/ccc-army-leaves-mali-un-peacekeeping-mission>

13 November 2019 - at airport.

http://www.colombopage.com/archive_20B/Nov13_1605287083CH.php November 2020 South Sudan bound.

<https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/accused-war-criminal-sends-sri-lankan-troops-un-peacekeeping-mission>

November 2020 - South Sudan bound.

<https://www.army.lk/news/sri-lanka-army-manufactured-air-conditioned-mali-bound-unibuffels-ready-shipment-0>

June 2020 - vehicles for Mali.

⁵ OHCHR 19 Aug 2019 Bachelet "deeply troubled" by appointment of new Sri Lankan army chief'

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24908&LangID=E>

⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24923&LangID=E>

⁷ <https://twitter.com/usembsl/status/1163400674643759104?lang=en>

⁸ https://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/sri_lanka/highlights-faits/2019/2019-08-21-statement-declaration.aspx?lang=eng

⁹ https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/lebanon/66564/joint-statement_en

¹⁰ <https://www.state.gov/public-listing-january-2020-march-2020/>

¹¹ <https://www.army.lk/news/promoted-general-shavendra-silva-honoured-elegantly-dressed-gajaba-regiment-troops-presenting>

¹² <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/db201102.doc.htm>

