

INTERNATIONAL
TRUTH
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PROJECT

Press release: Delegates to the International Maritime Conference should ask Sri Lanka about Navy torture.

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Johannesburg: High level defence officials attending the Galle Dialogue [International Maritime Conference](#) in Colombo on Monday should publicly urge their hosts to cooperate with a current Sri Lankan police investigation into systematic torture in secret naval intelligence detention sites in the island. They should also boycott [events](#) chaired by the Chief of Staff of the Sri Lankan Navy, Nishantha Ulugetenna, who was the [Director of Naval Intelligence](#) when the torture by naval intelligence units occurred.

“The Sri Lankan police have investigated the abduction and disappearance by a special navy intelligence unit of 11 men in 2008-9 but this is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the criminality of the Navy,” said the Executive Director of the International Truth and Justice Project (ITJP), Yasmin Sooka. *“A large swathe of the top navy commanders were complicit in or had knowledge of and at best condoned illegal detention, torture, enforced disappearances in multiple sites - and at worst were in command and control and ordered these crimes. Nobody has yet been held accountable.”*

The Chief of Staff of the Sri Lankan Navy, DNS Ulugetenna, who is one of the hosts of the international meeting, was the Navy’s Director of Intelligence from 2011-13¹. A torture site operated in the country’s most secure naval base in Trincomalee until mid 2012, run by the Navy’s Special Intelligence Unit; as Director of Intelligence for three years

¹ <https://www.parliament.lk/uploads/documents/paperspresented/performance-report-srilanka-navy-2011.pdf>
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during this period Ulugetenna must have known of its existence but he failed to act to save people inside the underground dungeons. The chief Sri Lankan police investigator told a court in Colombo that conditions in the underground site were so bad that just being held there constituted torture. This is endorsed by some survivors whose eyesight remains permanently damaged by being kept for years in the dark, among other physical and psychological damage from brutal torture.

The ITJP was the first organisation to [publish](#) the GPS location of the Navy torture site in Trincomalee in 2015, based on survivor testimony. The UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) then visited the site, corroborated its existence and noted that systematic torture had taken place in the underground cells for some years and could not have operated “unnoticed” by other officials. It added that it was clear that many more people were detained and tortured there.

Police investigators have described to the court serious political interference in their investigation with senior Naval officials refusing to cooperate, threatening witnesses and even police officers. There has also been a pattern of rewarding, protecting and promoting the key Navy suspects identified in this case by the police. At one point the country’s most senior military officer, the Chief of Defence Staff, Admiral Ravindra Wijegunaratne was arrested for allegedly attempting to abduct a witness who had testified that Wijegunaratne had hidden an absconding suspect in Navy HQ. That witness subsequently had to flee the country while the Chief of Defence Staff was released on bail and had his contract as Chief of Defence Staff extended.

One of the officers arrested by Sri Lankan police for allegedly being in charge of the torture site was DKP Dassanayake. Court documents² indicate that Rear Admiral Ulugetenna complained that Dassanayake had been involved in human smuggling post war and an internal inquiry was carried out recommending he be removed as Provost Marshal (ironically he was in charge of discipline) and punished. The Navy have to date failed to make a copy of the inquiry available to the police and last month promoted Dassanayake to Commodore and made him Director of Management Logistics even though he’s free on bail in a case involving 11 enforced disappearances.

The Navy has yet to hand over all the detention records, guard rosters, accounts, vehicle logs, employment histories, internal inquiry reports to police investigators who have so far focused on lower level naval officials rather than those in command and control of the torture.

“The Admirals who visit Colombo to discuss maritime security with the Sri Lankan Navy should be mindful of the fact they come from countries that are signatories to the Convention Against Torture which has universal jurisdiction. They must not be photographed with alleged perpetrators or send a message that condones grave violations of human rights,” said Ms Sooka.

² 25 September 2017.

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