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Press Release: Sri Lanka betrays its people by promoting alleged war criminal to head its army.

19 August 2019

Johannesburg: The Sri Lankan President's decision to appoint a notorious alleged war criminal, Major General Shavendra Silva, as Commander of the Army is immensely damaging to the country and marks the end of any reconciliation process, given the allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity against him.

In January this year the International Truth and Justice Project published a 137-page [Dossier](#) on Silva which showed there was more than enough evidence to charge him with war crimes and crimes against humanity. Instead he has now been promoted to the most powerful job in the army just months before important elections.

"This is a man who has shown his willingness to violate international law," said ITJP Executive Director Yasmin Sooka, *"his promotion will spark fear throughout the country but especially among the hundreds of thousands of Tamils who suffered immense loss in 2009 when Silva allegedly oversaw attacks on civilian sites".*

Shavendra Silva has also never been held accountable for his role in crushing the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) or People's Liberation Front uprising in the late eighties during which there were credible allegations of summary executions, enforced disappearances, torture and sexual violence, and the detention of thousands of Sinhala youth. Some of the violations occurred in Matale where Silva was based, serving under Gotabaya Rajapaksa who commanded the first Gajaba Regiment there.

"After so much bloodshed Sri Lankans need to hold their leaders accountable in order to stop the repeated cycles of violence. Silva's promotion however sends a message of total impunity," added Ms. Sooka.

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Silva's appointment also throws into question US assistance to the Sri Lankan Army which is subject to Leahy Laws which prohibit the U.S. from providing military assistance to foreign security force units that violate human rights with impunity. The appointment could also potentially impact Sri Lanka's recent resumption of deployment of UN peacekeepers. Peacekeeping deployment was put on hold for most of 2018 while more stringent vetting arrangements were put in place to ensure soldiers who had fought in units (such as Silva's 58 Division) in areas where alleged war crimes took place in 2008-9 were screened out.

"I imagine there has been intense diplomatic lobbying to stop Sri Lanka taking this step - with all the consequences explained. It's striking an own goal for any country to take this step and frankly disheartening particularly for the Rule of Law," added Sooka.

"I very much hope Sri Lanka's allies will now take a principled step and ensure Major General Shavendra Silva is not granted a visa to travel abroad even on official duty."

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