

INTERNATIONAL
TRUTH
AND JUSTICE
PROJECT

Press Release: UN repatriates Sri Lankan peacekeeper for his role in 2009 war.

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Johannesburg: For the first time the UN has asked the Government of Sri Lanka to repatriate a peacekeeper because of his participation in alleged war crimes during the country's civil war. A UN spokesman announced on Friday that the request for Lt. Col. Kalana P.L. Amunupure to leave Mali was made "based on recently received information".

"We are delighted to see the dossier we submitted on Amunupure to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in June this year has now resulted in this step," said the International Truth and Justice Project's executive director, Yasmin Sooka.

"We still don't know how many tens of thousands of Tamils died in the 2009 war and not one person has been held accountable - maybe this small step can give survivors a little hope that one day they will get justice. There is no doubt this action sends a very strong message to Sri Lanka that alleged war criminals can no longer be rewarded with prestigious UN jobs and in future will not escape stringent vetting," added Ms. Sooka.

During the final phase of Sri Lanka's civil war in 2009 Amunupure was second in command of the 11th Sri Lanka Light Infantry which operated under the 58th Division. A UN Investigation in 2015 found reasonable grounds to say the 58th Division was involved in the repeated shelling of UN sites and hospitals as well as the killing of surrendeeds and torture. Amunupure's unit is named in contemporaneous sources, including government reports¹, as having been involved in the assaults

¹ Sri Lanka: The largest hostage rescue mission in the world launched, 10 April 2009, Government report at <https://reliefweb.int/report/sri-lanka/sri-lanka-largest-hostage-rescue-mission-world-launched>

on Puthukkudiyiruppu (PTK) town in February 2009 and Putumattalan in March 2009, both of which involved extensive civilian casualties. The UN report described doctors in Putumattalan being unable to reach the dead and dying because of intense shelling and gunfire. At the time the ICRC, which rarely makes public statements, called the impact of the military's attacks on densely populated civilian areas near Putumattalan's makeshift hospital "nothing short of catastrophic"².

Amunupure was despatched as commander of the Sri Lankan contingent in Mali in December 2017. At his departure ceremony the Sri Lankan army commander described the UN assignment as an international endorsement of the military's record³.

"Sri Lanka must not be allowed to keep on using peacekeeping to pretend it has got away with its conduct in 2009. Three years ago the country co-sponsored a resolution at the Human Rights Council in Geneva promising, among other things, to establish a Hybrid Court and to vet public and security officials. These commitments have not been honoured," said Ms.Sooka.

"It is also totally unacceptable that Amunupure's commanding officer in 2009, Major General Shavendra Silva, is now the Adjutant General of the Sri Lankan Army⁴. This means one of the most notorious alleged war criminals actually oversees the Army's human rights directorate and also is the officer who would investigate any violations abroad by peacekeepers. In addition, the commanders of the 2009 war have been training the younger generation of officers, including in the Institute of Peace Support Operations Training Sri Lanka (IPSOTSL), which does not send the right message of reform."

In February this year all deployment of Sri Lankan peacekeepers was suspended after the Sri Lanka Army tried to send peacekeepers to Lebanon whose human rights vetting had not been completed. The Army has announced deployments will resume in December 2018.

In 2007, 134 Sri Lankan peacekeepers were repatriated from Haiti after a UN investigation alleged they had been involved in systematic child sexual exploitation which occurred over three years from 2004-7⁵. Amunupure was part of the first contingent of UN peacekeepers posted in Haiti in 2004. To date the Sri Lankan Government has given contradictory details about how it disciplined the alleged perpetrators of sexual abuse but none was put behind bars for this grave crime⁶. In 2016, the UN Committee Against Torture asked Sri Lanka for information on how the repatriated peacekeepers were punished and this has still not been supplied two years later⁷.

² A/HRC/30/CRP.2, Para 848.

³ 'UN assignment in Mali endorses SL Army's international capabilities', 22 Dec 2017, Daily News, <http://www.dailynews.lk/2017/12/22/local/138037/un-assignment-mali-endorses-sl-army's-international-capabilities>

⁴ PRESS RELEASE: SRI LANKA FLOUTS UN COMMITMENTS BY APPOINTING ALLEGED WAR CRIMINAL TO ADMINISTER ARMY <http://www.itjpsl.com/assets/press/31-March-2017-ITJP-PRESS-RELEASE-3.pdf>

⁵ See ITJP & JDS Lanka joint dossier at <http://www.itjpsl.com/assets/press/haiti-FINAL.pdf>

⁶ Press Statement: Haiti: More than a decade and still hiding <http://www.itjpsl.com/assets/press/Press-Statement-haiti-f.pdf>

⁷ UNCAT letter 20 August 2018.

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