

**MAITHRI SAYS NO TO UN INVESTIGATORS IN SRI LANKA AND NO
GUARANTEE SINHALA VERSION OF *NO FIRE ZONE* WILL NOT BE BLOCKED**

***No Fire Zone* Director accuses President of taking situation “back to
square one”**

The BBC has reported that President Sirisena of Sri Lanka has said he will set up a domestic inquiry into the war crimes investigated by *No Fire Zone* and successive UN reports. But when asked whether he would grant permission for the UN investigators to visit the country he said no, claiming there is no need for the UN to be involved in conducting the investigations. The BBC also reported that he said he "doesn't believe" war crimes allegations against the military in the documentary "*No Fire Zone*"

BBC Report is here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-31844796?OCID=fbasia>

No Fire Zone Director Callum Macrae said:

“These comments by President Sirisena are both surprising and disappointing and represent a step backwards in the search for justice. I’m afraid his proposal for a domestic inquiry is profoundly undermined by his own subsequent comments.”

“He says this domestic inquiry will be conducted “efficiently, in a balanced, legal and impartial manner”, but when asked about the allegations in *No Fire Zone* he said he “doesn’t believe” them.”

“How does he expect witnesses and survivors of these awful crimes to come forward and testify at a domestic investigation set up by someone who has effectively said in advance that he “doesn’t believe” the events they will describe. How can such a process be described as ‘impartial’”

“For justice to be done, the process adopted has to have the trust and confidence of all sides and, in particular, the victims.

“When the UN Human Rights Council set up its international inquiry (OISL) in March last year it was because it had reached the conclusion that for all his promises of a domestic enquiry, President Rajapaksa had demonstrated that he was neither willing, nor capable of providing a genuinely credible and impartial one. When the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights postponed the publication of the OISL report to September he said it was to allow the new government ‘to show its willingness to cooperate’ and because it could lead to a ‘stronger and more comprehensive report’”

“But now President Sirisena, like President Rajapaksa before him, has refused to let the OISL investigators in to Sri Lanka. So we are back to square one and when the OISL report is presented in September the UN Human Rights Council will have to act on that report and move to set up some form of international judicial mechanism which can ensure that justice is done for all the communities of Sri Lanka.”

“There is no doubt that such a process represents the best way, for all the people of Sri Lanka, to get to the truth and open the way to justice, peace, reconciliation and democratic political solutions for all. No-one has anything to fear from the truth except the guilty.”

PRESIDENT SIRISENA REFUSES TO GUARANTEE “FREEDOM OF THE PRESS” TO *NO FIRE ZONE*

Asked about the film – which was released in Sinhala yesterday and can be seen for free on <http://nofirezone.org/sinhala-version> - President Sirisena said he did not accept the allegations raised by *No Fire Zone*. According to a translation of the interview by Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka “I think we have to reject those things. I don't believe such things,” he said. However, he also admitted he hadn't actually seen it.

Sirisena also suggested that there are “questions” about how the information was obtained for the film, claiming that the film set out to “mislead the international community about the situation.”

Yesterday at the launch of the film, Director Callum Macrae called on President Sirisena, in the light of his government's pledge to lift restrictions on the press, to give a guarantee that the film would not be blocked from being seen in Sri Lanka. He also announced that he was calling on Sri Lankan TV networks to show the film and offered to travel over to take part in a live studio debate after the screening.

When the BBC reporter asked President Sirisena, “whether you will allow this film to be aired or will you ban it?” he replied: “No, even to decide whether we must allow it to be shown, we have to watch the film. Because we don't know what it contains. So we have to watch it first.”

Macrae commented:

“This is a very disquieting response from a man who says he is committed to a free press. He seems to be suggesting unless he approves of this film he will not let it be seen. In that he is no different from President Rajapaksa. “

“He also says he has not yet seen the film, yet when I offered him a copy outside Number 10 yesterday he declined to take it. I'm afraid there seems to be a huge gulf between what he says and what he does in practice. That too will seem familiar to those who knew the last government of Sri Lanka well.”

Ends

Callum Macrae is available for interview on 00 44 (0) 7860 256 127