



Human Rights Groups Welcome Removal of Alleged War Criminal Silva from U.N. Peacekeeping Group

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WASHINGTON, D.C., FEB. 23, 2012—Human rights groups welcome the announcement that Shavendra Silva—a former military general in the Sri Lankan army who stands accused of extrajudicial killing and torture—has been removed from U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s Special Advisory Group on Peacekeeping Operations. In a press statement released on February 22, Louise Fréchette, the Chair of the Special Advisory Group, stated that Silva’s participation in the group is “not appropriate or helpful.”

Silva is the defendant in a civil lawsuit filed by SPEAK Human Rights & Environmental Initiative and American University Washington College of Law’s UNROW Human Rights Impact Litigation Clinic. The suit concerns Silva’s central role in the Sri Lankan Army’s brutal military campaign against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The Army’s campaign caused up to 40,000 civilian deaths and violated fundamental principles of international humanitarian and human rights law. Silva commanded the 58th Division of the Army, which is specifically named in a U.N. Panel of Experts report as bearing responsibility for violations of international law.

“We are happy to hear that the Special Advisory Group on Peacekeeping Operations has recognized that Silva was an egregious choice for this group. Silva stands accused of authorizing and directly perpetrating mass atrocities against civilians in Sri Lanka. Silva should be investigated and prosecuted in a court of law, not promoted to a United Nations committee,” said Ali Beydoun, lead counsel on this case. “The removal of Silva from this group is an expression of the international community’s condemnation of Silva, but it is only a small measure of justice for his victims. The world is aware of the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Sri Lanka, and members of the Sri Lankan Army like Silva will not be allowed to evade accountability forever, particularly when they travel abroad to countries with firm commitments to human rights law.”

SPEAK and UNROW filed the civil suit against Silva in the Southern District Court of New York. On February 8th, the court dismissed the case for lack of subject matter jurisdiction based on Silva’s purported diplomatic immunity. On February 22nd, Beydoun filed a motion in the court, requesting that the court reconsider its decision.

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