



SRI LANKA'S
SPECIAL
TASK FORCE

APRIL 2018

INTERNATIONAL
TRUTH
AND JUSTICE
PROJECT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report reveals why members of the Special Task Force paramilitary unit of the Sri Lankan police should not be sent abroad as UN peacekeepers without stringent vetting and screening. This unit has from its inception in 1983 been steeped in allegations of human rights violations, including abductions, torture, killings and extrajudicial executions. The violations described in this report speak to an amoral attitude to the taking of life and to human dignity, and where dehumanisation has become institutionalised. Shockingly, those responsible for the violations have been rewarded post-war by successive governments in Sri Lanka.

The STF was a frontline combat unit in the East of Sri Lanka at the climax of the civil war and should be subjected to the same vetting and screening criteria as military units who fought in the war when considered for UN peacekeeping roles. Individuals belonging to military units implicated in the UN OHCHR Investigation into Sri Lanka have been barred from peacekeeping.

The ITJP has collected 56 names of individuals in the STF who should not be sent as UN peacekeepers. This breaks down as:

- a preliminary list of 32 names of STF officers involved in frontline command positions who should be barred from peacekeeping;
- an additional list of 24 names of alleged perpetrators or individuals complicit in grave violations of human rights in the STF.
- the name of an STF officer who is currently serving in Africa who should be sent home immediately and investigated in connection with multiple grave violations in Sri Lanka.
- detailed information on secret torture sites that were operated in the past by Tamil paramilitaries.

This information has not been made public in order to protect witnesses in any future judicial process. The names will be shared with the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping (DPKO), the Department of Field Support (DFS), the Conduct and Discipline Unit (CDU) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

This report is the first by the ITJP to be based primarily on insider witnesses, interviewed in four different countries by multiple investigators. They include several former STF officers and Tamil paramilitaries.

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1. SPECIAL TASK FORCE

1.1. CONTEXT

The Special Task Force is an elite paramilitary unit within the police, established in 1983 to provide VIP protection, riot control and intelligence support to the police in the face of the rising threat of LTTE, especially in the East of Sri Lanka. STF officers dress like the military, wearing green berets and camouflage uniforms¹.

The STF were trained by the Royal Ulster Constabulary² in the 1980s and by a private company, 'Kini Mini Service'³, run by ex SAS, as well as by the Israelis⁴. There have also been media reports that the UK has been training the STF again in the post war period⁵. Overall, 3,500 Sri Lankan police have reportedly been trained by the Scottish Police Academy since 2007⁶ and since 2016 the British High Commission in Colombo has assisting with police reform⁷ and participating in meetings regarding training with the STF Commandant⁸.

¹ OISL (132), A/HRC/30/CRP.2.

² Tamil widow blames RUC for training team she says killed her family; Sri Lankan police visited Belfast in 1983 to study elite RUC commando unit, The Irish Times, 24 July 2017, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/tamil-widow-blames-ruc-for-training-team-she-says-killed-her-family-1.3164487>; Exporting police death squads From Armagh to Trincomalee, International Human Rights Association - Bremen, Phil Miller. http://www.ptsrilanka.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/exporting_police_death_squads_web.pdf

³ Commandos strengthen post-war 'law enforcement' ops, STF's 27th anniversary on Sept 1, 31 August 2011, The Island, http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=33659.

⁴ "KMS taught the same psychological interrogation techniques in Sri Lanka as used by the British Army in Northern Ireland. These were two stress positions (1. Standing facing a wall with arms outstretched, leaning on fingertips, 2. a ski position), hooding, white noise and "humiliation". KMS told the Sri Lankan soldiers not to use physical torture. However, troops trained by the company ignored this advice and carried out atrocities, such as putting burning tyres around the necks of captured Tamils." says: Exporting police death squads From Armagh to Trincomalee, International Human Rights Association - Bremen, Phil Miller. http://www.ptsrilanka.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/exporting_police_death_squads_web.pdf

⁵ "SP Daulagala also has the distinction of being the pioneer of the Bomb Disposal Squad having received his training in Israel", according to: STF GEARED TO RESPOND TO CBRNE, 2 April 2017, Sunday Observer, <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:dBE-EPOdWtcJ:www.sundayobserver.lk/2017/04/02/stf-geared-respond-cbrne+&cd=8&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk&client=safari>; "President Jayewardene obtained Israeli assistance to train the STF VIP protection team. Experts were sent by the then Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres." according to: Nimal Lewke Intelligence, essential parent of VIP security, 19 May 2016, Daily News <http://www.dailynews.lk/2016/05/19/features/82126>, This also says: "STF personnel were later trained by Ex-SAS personnel. PSD, PMSD and STF personnel were sent to America, under the anti-terrorist assistance programme, to the Diplomatic Security Training Centre in Honolulu on many occasions to enhance their knowledge on VIP security".

⁶ Britain's dirty war against the Tamil people 1979-2009, Phil Miller, https://www.tamilnet.com/img/publish/2014/07/britains_dirty_war.pdf Tamil woman seeks to hold RUC accountable for Sri Lankan massacre, <http://www.irishlegal.com/7997/tamil-woman-seeks-to-hold-ruc-accountable-for-sri-lankan-massacre/>; Undercover Footage Shows British Police Are Training Riot-Cops Linked to War Crimes in Sri Lanka, 7 December 2017, https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/qv338m/undercover-footage-shows-british-police-are-training-riot-cops-linked-to-war-crimes-in-sri-lanka; According to the police website: <https://www.police.lk/index.php/special-task-force-/284> and: A para-military force par excellence, War on terror revisited, August 30, 2012, The Island, http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=60369; Victory Assured: Inside the Special Task Force (STF), 30 APRIL 2016, THE NATION, <http://nation.lk/online/2016/04/30/victory-assured.html>

Also: <http://www.scotland.police.uk/about-us/police-scotland/scottish-police-college/international-development-and-innovation-unit/successful-training-programmes>

⁷ Revealed: how Scots police trained Sri Lankan cops linked to human rights abuse, 8 September 2013, Scottish Herald, http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/13121850.Revealed_how_Scots_police_trained_Sri_Lankan_cops_linked_to_human_rights_abuse/ ALSO THE SCOTTISH POLICE ASSISTED WITH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NATIONAL POLICE ACADEMY IN SRI LANKA ACCORDING TO: Police Scotland under fire after new evidence of Sri Lankan torture, 24 MAY 2016, THE FERRET, [HTTPS://THEFERRET.SCOT/POLICE-SCOTLAND-IN-SRI-LANKAN-STATE-TORTURE-CONTROVERSY/](https://theferret.scot/police-scotland-in-sri-lankan-state-torture-controversy/); SRI LANKA POLICE TRAINING DEAL 'HIDEOUS COLLUSION', 19 MARCH 2015, THE NATIONAL, [HTTP://WWW.THENATIONAL.SCOT/NEWS/14897188.SRI_LANKA_POLICE_TRAINING_DEAL_HIDEOUS_COLLUSION/](http://www.thenational.scot/news/14897188.SRI_LANKA_POLICE_TRAINING_DEAL_HIDEOUS_COLLUSION/)

⁸ "The BHC has CSSF funding of £1.2million for FY17/18 and FY18/19 to support the Sri Lankan Ministry of Law and Order (MoLO) and the SLPS to implement the Police Reform Plan (PRP). The BHC's main implementing partners are TAF (the Asia Foundation) and Police Scotland (PS)", says CSO Task Vacancy - Job Description from stabilisation Unit. This confirms the UK has been training the Sri Lankan police since 2001.

⁹ The Sri Lankan police website shows Scottish police with the deputy British High Commissioner meeting the STF commandant in 2017. "Many people including Mrs. Laura Davies, Deputy British High Commissioner to Sri Lanka & Maldives, Mr. McKillop, Superintendent of Police Scotland, Mr. Nelson Murphy Telfer, Chief Superintendent of Police Scotland, S.D.I.G. (Administration) Mr. C. D. Wickramaratna, S.D.I.G, S.T.F. Commandant and Officer in Charge of the International Affairs, Recruitment & Training Range, Mr. M. R. Latieff

1.11 Human Rights Record

For three and a half decades the UN and multiple international and Sri Lankan human rights groups and governments have reported on the STF's alleged involvement in grave human rights and humanitarian law violations - for a detailed summary spanning 1984 to 2018, please see **ANNEX 1**.

The UN OHCHR Investigation into Sri Lanka (OISL) based on a 'reasonable grounds to believe' threshold is sufficient to trigger a prosecutorial investigation into the STF in connection with abduction, enforced disappearance, torture and the killing of civilians.

The OISL report was produced in 2015 which led to UNHRC Resolution 30/1 at the Human Rights Council in 2015 and the commitment by the Government of Sri Lanka to accountability including through vetting of public and security officials. To date there has been no security sector reform initiative to address the allegations of past violations committed by the STF. Nor has there been any vetting of public and security officials as promised by the Sri Lankan Government in 2015 under UNHRC Resolution 30/1. Quite the reverse: one of the most senior war time STF commanders, Nimal Lewke, has been appointed chief of security for President Sirisena in what appears to be an endorsement of his war time role by the highest officer bearer of the country.

1.12 Frontline Combat Unit

The STF at no time since its inception was merely carrying out a civilian policing job during the war in Sri Lanka; it was specifically tasked with a frontline combat role in the war in support of the other branches of the security forces. The STF was armed with heavy weapons like the army⁹ and at times also spearheaded ground offensives in the East of Sri Lanka¹⁰. The army also stationed their artillery units with heavy weaponry in STF bases¹¹. In the post-war period the STF has been used for riot control and VIP Protection.

participated in this occasion." **Special meeting between Sri Lankan IOP and heads of the Scotland Police**, <https://www.police.lk/index.php/special-events-/2526-special-meeting-between-sri-lankan-igp-and-heads-of-the-scotland-police>

⁹ ITJP Witness: "We enhanced our security at the [STF] camp, put more heavy weapons out on patrol and we received a large influx of ordinance, over five times what we already had and requiring us to build new places to stockpile the supplies. We also had to clean the heavy weaponry, including GPMGs, MPMGs, and an 5.0 anti-aircraft gun mounted as a ground weapon that was mounted on a sentry point. There was also an intensification of monitoring LTTE radio communications."

¹⁰ One such STF led operation was called "Victory Assured" or "Niyathai Jaya" which began in the jungles of Kanchikudichchi Aru in Amparai District on 4 January 2007 against LTTE strongholds (This is referenced in para 68 of OISL). An STF officer involved described it to the ITJP as "an STF operation with artillery support from the Sri Lankan army and some air support."

Media reports say the intelligence for the operation originated from the STF.

¹¹ The initial operational plans were drawn on the basis of the intelligence provided by the Intelligence Units and the Communication Interception Units of the STF, Passing out parade of the 60th Intake of the Special Task Force (STF) today: **The force that bolstered the Forces, 12 June 2009, Daily News**, <http://archives.dailynews.lk/2001/pix/PrintPage.asp?REF=/2009/06/12/fea35.asp>

1.13 Counter Terrorism

The Government itself has conceded that during the final phase of the war from 2005-7 in the East of Sri Lanka the STF was pivotal in “counter terrorism” and security operations. Former secretary of defence, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, said in an interview:

“In the Eastern province, the STF played a very important role. The STF was responsible for the operations conducted in Kokkadicholai, Karadiyanaru and areas towards the Southern parts such as Panama and also maintaining security in the Batticaloa District. In the Eastern Province, we deployed more Policemen beyond their normal police duties. .. Therefore, the Police was involved in counter terrorism in a major way, in a bigger way than the previous role that they played. Their contribution has been vital¹²”.

1.14 Intelligence Role

The role of the STF included countering any acts of civil disobedience through enforcement of the Emergency Regulations¹³. Former employees say the STF gathered intelligence about persons, including members of parliament and internationals, that could and was used as leverage against them in the event that they caused problems for the government. One STF officer said he personally knew a very senior Sri Lankan judicial officer who had been threatened by the government as he was alleged to have visited sex workers. Another STF officer described monitoring LTTE radio intercepts as part of his job and another was involved in centrally coordinating intelligence gathered from the ground¹⁴. STF staff posted in the East say it was mandatory for them to learn Tamil to be able to talk to villagers and gather intelligence.

1.15 Security for Torture Sites

Boosa is a notorious detention centre in Galle in the South of Sri Lanka where torture has long been endemic. Victims detained in Boosa say the STF provided

¹² DEFENCE SECRETARY GOTABAYA RAJAPAKSA SALUTES THE WAR HEROES. June 2009, Business Week Interview with Gotabaya Rajapaksa. http://www.businesstoday.lk/cover_page.php?article=891

¹³ “When the Rajapaksas came to power, Gotabhaya took direct control of the STF under the Emergency Regulations that the GoSL brought in. This gave the government wide-ranging powers and removed a number of the accountability procedures under the SL Code of Criminal Procedure.” ITJP Witness.

¹⁴ (i) “There were about four intelligence officers in every camp. Some main camps would pool intelligence from other camps. They reported information back to STF Intelligence HQ, focussing on LTTE personnel and movements, and any security related information... We received information from about 60 camps from around the country that were channelled through 11 sectors (Batticaloa, Karaitivu, Vavuniya, Ampara, Trincomalee, Kokkadicholai, Mannar, Kanchikudiaru, Pottuvil, Maha oya, Kalwanchikudi, Vaunatiu.) The quality of STF intelligence seemed to be generally poor. Their sources seemed to be mainly younger women, which on the basis of my field experience, coupled with the quality of what was submitted raised my suspicions about why these were the primary sources.” ITJP Witness.

(ii) “The Karuna cadres operated separately from us, although intelligence was shared at senior level”. ITJP Witness.

guards for the site between 2009-12¹⁵. Two torture victims interviewed by the ITJP say they were also transported to or from Boosa by members of the STF¹⁶.

1.2 STF ROLE STRENGTHENED POST WAR

In 2017 the Minister of Law and Order said there was a plan to strengthen the role of the STF¹⁷. The paramilitary force is still being deployed inside Sri Lanka for routine law and order duties without any apparent security sector reform programme or accountability process for the past systematic violations it perpetrated¹⁸. In the most recent anti-Muslim violence it has been alleged in the Sri Lankan media that some STF officers were complicit if not actually involved¹⁹.

1.3 STF AS UN PEACEKEEPERS

1.31 UN Deployment

In 2017 the Sri Lankan media reported that 140-200 STF would be deployed as peacekeepers as part of a “formed police unit”. However the preparation process for this deployment appears to have started as early as 2013, when two STF officers with frontline combat experience in the war, SSP Waruna Jayasundera²⁰ and SP Athula Daulagala²¹, were reportedly sent to South Sudan as peacekeepers²².

¹⁵ (i) 2010-12: “When I arrived at Boosa, I saw STF providing security at the outer perimeter of the facility and after passing that there was a police guard post. Between those two points there was a prison for Sinhalese prisoners. Boosa was surrounded by a very high brick fence with four sentry points on top where STF were standing guard”. W289

(ii) 2009-11: “Boosa is a like a prison camp surrounded by a high wall with barbed wire at the top. There are 3 or 4 sentry points manned by STF who observed.” W281

¹⁶ (i) “The STF came and transported me and another detainee to Colombo. I was taken once for 2 nights to Colombo and I never came back to Boosa. I was handcuffed and blindfolded and nobody told me where we were going”. W218 in 2009.

(ii) “I was among 18 detainees who were handcuffed and put on a bus with metal wire net on the sides. There were six TID officers in the bus with us. In front of the bus was an STF jeep and behind a green colored Pajero with TID officers”. W305 describing events in Dec 2010.

¹⁷ Sri Lanka looks to strengthen Special Task Force, 3 September 2017, <http://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-looks-strengthen-special-task-force>

¹⁸ For example: STF deployed for security of Kataragama, CID to investigate police shooting, 21 January 2018, Colombo Page, http://www.colombopage.com/archive_18A/Jan21_1516549021CH.php

¹⁹ (i) STF brutality against Muslims in Digana: March 5, 18 March 2018, Ruki Fernando, <https://rukiiii.wordpress.com/tag/stf/>

(ii) Video: STF Colludes With Goons Who Perpetrated Anti-Muslim Violence, 8 March 2018, Colombo Telegraph, <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/video-stf-colludes-with-goons-who-perpetrated-anti-muslim-violence/>

(iii) “First STF Takes Away From Muslims Whatever They Have To Defend Themselves Including Knives and Then Muslims Come Under Attack From Mobs” – Statement From Affected Muslim Person, 7 March 2018, DBS Jeyaraj blog, <http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/58153>

²⁰ (i) Reportedly ASP Varuna Jayasundera was Acting Area Commander, Batticaloa in 2006 for STF according to: The Police Commandos played a major role in the war, Shamindra Ferdinando, The Island, <http://www.island.lk/2009/05/31/defence1.html> . His name is sometimes spelt Varuna.

(ii) Also his Linked In page says: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/waruna-jayasundara-a1a8139b/>

“I was invited for the United Nations “Thematic Meeting on Police Administration Strategic Guidance Framework for International Police Peacekeeping” held in July 2016 at Brindisi, Italy and I was nominated for the United Nations Initial Meeting on Formed Police Unit Doctrine Review Group held in Amman Jordan during June 2015 “

²¹ He studied explosives engineer at Cranfield University, UK and was trained by the Israeli police according to SEARCHED AND SECURED, 16 July 2017, the Sunday Observer Lanka, <http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2017/07/16/focus/searched-and-secured>. From 15 April 2016 he was training others, according to his Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/athula.daulagala> and as of July 2017 he is assigned to the IAEA as an expert, STF OFFICER ON IAEA PANEL, 16 July 2017, The Sunday Observer Lanka, <http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2017/07/16/news/stf-officer-iaea-panel>.

According to ITJP witnesses, SSP Jayasundera was in charge of intelligence in the East in 2006-7. His Linked In page says he is now Coordinating Officer for police affairs in the Ministry of Law and Order²³ and adds that he was part of the Sri Lankan delegation which regained the GSP+ concession from the European Union in 2017.

Then Chief Inspector R.M.Wimalaratne²⁴ and Inspector D.G.M.Chinthaka²⁵ were also sent to attend a training program in Jordan in 2015 and then trained 14 other officers²⁶. In 2016 an STF Commander with extensive frontline combat experience appears to have been deployed in Africa as a UN peacekeeper where he is still serving. There are allegations from ITJP witnesses that he ordered summary executions of Tamils in the East of Sri Lanka in 2006-7.

1.32 Peacekeeping to rehabilitate the STF

The Sri Lankan Government views peacekeeping as a means of rehabilitating the reputation of its armed forces who stand accused of grave violations of international humanitarian law, for which there has been no criminal accountability in a decade, despite commitments made to the Human Rights Council in Geneva. In fact the Government of Sri Lanka now boasts about not holding any security official accountable²⁷.

The Sri Lankan Government in justifying the expense of equipping²⁸ the STF for UN peacekeeping (with infantry fighting vehicles and logistics vehicles) argued, "it would help in "portraying the professionalism of the Sri Lanka Police and the STF"²⁹. The Sri Lankan media has also emphasised the financial benefit to peacekeeping and the element of "international recognition for the STF"³⁰. The Sri Lankan Prime Minister at the STF training centre said since 2015 his government had worked to strengthen the police by giving them more financial assistance and as a result had won them global recognition: "That is

²² Jaysundera's Linked IN page says he was from Oct2013-14 "Information Analyst to Joint Missions Analysis Center (JMAC) at Mission Hq, Juba, South Sudan I was responsible for analyzing of 'Rule of Law' situation in South Sudan."

²³ Linked In, Ibid.

²⁴ The chief instructor who coordinates and supervises training at the school is Chief Inspector R.M.Wimalaratna, according to: Creating the ultimate warrior, 25 September 2016, The Sunday Observer Lanka, <http://archives.sundayobserver.lk/2001/pix/PrintPage.asp?REF=/2016/09/25/spe-foc-01.asp>

²⁵ "IP Chinthaka became the best student in arrest and handcuffing techniques" says A DUTY LADEN WITH THREATS AND RISKS: STF READY TO DEPLOY ON UN MISSION, The Sunday Observer Lanka, 7 May 2017, The Sunday Observer Lanka, <http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2017/05/07/focus/duty-laden-threats-and-risks-stf-ready-deploy-un-mission>. Also REALMS OF SAFETY, The Sunday Observer Lanka, 14 May 2017, <http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2017/05/14/features/realms-safety> .

²⁶ A DUTY LADEN WITH THREATS AND RISKS: STF READY TO DEPLOY ON UN MISSION, The Sunday Observer Lanka, 7 May 2017, The Sunday Observer Lanka, <http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2017/05/07/focus/duty-laden-threats-and-risks-stf-ready-deploy-un-mission>.

²⁷ "Remember, every single prosecution or investigation in Sri Lanka involving members of the armed forces are for personal criminal conduct that had nothing to do with the war. This government has not allowed a single person to be investigated for their conduct of the war, despite several false allegations to the contrary. That is what it means to truly stand by the armed forces, and not to just use our brave men and women in uniform as political tools to win votes." Foreign Minister Tilak Marapana, Sri Lanka emerges proud - united with allies at UNHRC, 24 March 2018, The Daily News, <http://www.dailynews.lk/2018/03/24/local/146449/sri-lanka-emerges-proud-united-allies-unhrc>

²⁸ http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.lk/cab/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=16&Itemid=49&lang=en&dID=7441 and bidding documents are here: http://www.lawandorder.lk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=223&Itemid=603 and tender documents in Israel: <http://www.srilankaembassyil.com/assets/pdf/notices/invitation-for-bids-ministry-of-law-and-order-southern-development.pdf>

²⁹ STF to be used for UN peacekeeping operations, 2 February 2017, Financial Times Lanka, <http://www.ft.lk/article/595462/STF-to-be-used-for-UN-peacekeeping-operations>

³⁰ STF to gain UN deployment, 3 February 2017, Mirror Citizen, <http://mirrorcitizen.dailymirror.lk/2017/02/03/stf-to-gain-un-deployment/>

why you have been assigned to the work of the United Nations Peacekeeping operations,” he told them³¹. The UN is set to reimburse the cost of this equipment, which brings into play the obligation of the UN to carry out a “due diligence” exercise arising from its financial support to Sri Lanka for the equipment.³²

1.4 VETTING

1.41 The Criteria

The ITJP is familiar with the criteria used by the Geneva based UN vetting team working on the Mali deployment from Sri Lanka in 2016. This team screened out any person involved in frontline combat units named in connection with violations in the OISL report. These criteria were applied to military officers; there is no reason to treat paramilitary police combat units differently. The STF is repeatedly named in the OISL report and the Government itself concedes they were a key part of its erroneously named “Humanitarian Operation”.

The role of the STF in abducting and killing suspects in detention in the latter part of the civil war is also well documented by the OISL report. On this basis alone, the vetting of UN peacekeepers should exclude all STF personnel who were involved in active combat in the East of Sri Lanka from 2005-7 and the North from 2007-9.

1.42 Sexual Exploitation

An insider witness describes how during the final phase of the war in the East of Sri Lanka, Tamil women were forced into providing sex to STF members; with a large number forced into sexual slavery, including some women being subjected to frequent “visits” by different personnel and expected to provide sexual services for them. This amounts to sexual exploitation and abuse.

A witness describes a colleague going to a house and ordering the husband to stand outside while going inside and raping his wife. The witness said his colleagues’ behavior would vary from place to place depending on the attitude of the Officer in Charge of the area – some would condone sexual violations, others would not.

³¹ [Police and all state institutions strengthened to eradicate 'drug terrorism' - PM , 28 February 2018, Colombo Page, http://www.colombopage.com/archive_18A/Feb28_1519799294CH.php](http://www.colombopage.com/archive_18A/Feb28_1519799294CH.php)

³² see Human rights due diligence policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces, UNSC and UNGA, UN Doc. A/67/775-S/2013/110, 5 March 2013 available at http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/SP/AMeetings/20thsession/IdenticalLetterSG25Feb2013_en.pdf

Given Sri Lanka's lack of criminal accountability for extensive and prolonged child sexual exploitation by its peacekeepers in Haiti in 2004-7, there should be more scrutiny before deploying abroad a force some of whose members allegedly engaged in sexual crimes.

Bizarrely the recent STF training for peacekeeping, according to media reports, appears to focus on the health risk to the men of unprotected sex rather than any code of conduct:

"The STF team members include single and married men. They will have to be away from their homes and families for the duration of one full year. They have also been mentally and emotionally prepared and taught about venereal diseases³³."

1.43 Human Rights Commission Vetting

In the wake of the 2015 OISL report and the decision to increase drastically the number of peacekeepers accepted from Sri Lanka, the vetting for 200 Sri Lankan soldiers going to Mali was conducted in Geneva by OHCHR in 2016 by a staff member who had worked on OISL and had the necessary expertise and institutional knowledge. This has been described as enhanced vetting.

Later in 2016, the vetting process was transferred to the domestic Human Rights Commission (HRCSL). The Government of Sri Lanka and the HRCSL signed a formal agreement whereby the latter would vet peacekeepers³⁴.

While civilian oversight of the military in any capacity is to be warmly welcomed, concerns remain about pushing this enormous task (vetting up to 3,500 individuals) on to one body with little experience of screening and vetting in what is a very challenging environment, and where this is not their main priority. Some observers have also raised concerns about whether the Human Rights Commission has vetted its own staff, some of whom were reported by human rights activists to be closely connected to members of the Armed Forces or participants in pro-government events even under the Rajapaksa period.

1.44 The UN's Policy

The UN's policy on the vetting of UN Peacekeepers takes place at two levels, i.e. by Member States/Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) and the UN itself, in respect of prior misconduct while in the service of UN peace operations. Member States however remain primarily responsible for vetting and screening

³³ A DUTY LADEN WITH THREATS AND RISKS: STF READY TO DEPLOY ON UN MISSION, 7 May 2017, The Sunday Observer Lanka, <http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2017/05/07/focus/duty-laden-threats-and-risks-stf-ready-deploy-un-mission>

³⁴ Letter from HRCSL to President Re: Briefing Concerning News Reports on the Vetting by the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka of Military Personnel to be Deployed for Peacekeeping Operations, 4 April 2018, <http://hrctl.lk/english/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Letter-to-H.E.-President-re-Vetting-English.pdf>

those they intend to deploy from their country before nominating them for service with the UN to ensure they meet the highest standards of integrity, including respect for and commitment to human rights.

The UN has also required since January 2016, that TCCs provide a formal certificate that proposed peacekeepers have a clear record. As provided by the UN policy on human rights screening:

“Member States who nominate or provide personnel to serve with the United Nations are requested to screen their personnel and to certify that they have not committed, or are alleged to have committed criminal offences and/or violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.”³⁵

Para. 50 of the UN-SG Report says that:

“Since January 2016, formal certifications from troop- and police-contributing countries have been required, upon the deployment or rotation of units, to provide clear assurances that proposed peacekeepers have not engaged in any misconduct or been involved in human rights violations before being accepted for deployment”³⁶.

The onus thus lies with the Member State to ensure that perpetrators of human rights violations including serious crimes such as torture, rape, sexual violence, killings, enforced disappearances and abductions are not deployed to UN Peacekeeping.

The UN is also supposed under its Human Rights Screening policy to conduct its own review of candidates based on the information that is **available to the United Nations** and publicly on the human rights conduct of individuals or groups of prospective personnel³⁷. However, it is clear that in most instances, this screening has been limited to Secretariat personnel and only to those at senior positions³⁸. In addition, the Conduct and Discipline Unit conducts vetting for prior misconduct while serving at the UN only for the personnel being deployed in the context of peacekeeping operations and special political missions. Since 2016 this vetting system has been used as a standard procedure for military and police contingents.

The UN’s criteria for assessment applies to ‘individual police officers’ seconded by Member States to peace operations. However the assessment only excludes officers who have been under investigation for a human rights,

³⁵ UN Policy - Human Rights Screening of United Nations Personnel, supra note 2, Para. 1.1.

³⁶ See UNGA, Report of the Secretary-General: Combating sexual exploitation and abuse, UN. Doc. A/71/97, 23 June 2016” says that such certifications are required from 2016 see para.50

³⁷ UNGA, Report of the Secretary-General: Combating sexual exploitation and abuse, UN. Doc. A/71/97, 23 June 2016, para.49

³⁸ Ibid., para.52.

criminal or disciplinary offence³⁹. If they come from a country where there is impunity for mass atrocities then it seems they would not be identified as problematic.

In addition the UN DPKO criteria address incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse as well as other misconduct committed while on previous peacekeeping duties and not in their country of origin⁴⁰. The OISL report on Sri Lanka speaks to systematic and widespread sexual violence by multiple units of the security forces and a policy of using sexual violence as a method of torture⁴¹.

Furthermore, Sri Lanka has signed a Voluntary Compact on Preventing and Addressing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse proposed by the UN-SG in September 2017. The Compact, which is between the Secretary-General and individual Member States, is intended to send a signal to the world of joint commitment and mutual accountability on the part of the United Nations and Member States on preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse⁴². It is also intended to be a demonstration of Sri Lanka's political will to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse, demand accountability and provide meaningful support to victims.

1.45 Vetting Failures

In February 2018 it became public that the last 3 Sri Lankan contingent commanders sent to Lebanon had not been subject to due diligence by Sri Lanka and should have been vetted out. The public disclosure of this information led to the suspension of the deployment of the fourth contingent commander, Lieutenant Colonel Rathnappuli Wasantha Kumara Hewage, days before he was due to leave⁴³. However there has been no transparency about what has happened subsequently to Lt. Col. Hewage's bid to become a peacekeeper.

The fact that a frontline commando from STF could be serving as a UN peacekeeper in Africa also speaks to the failure of vetting. We have credible information that this individual has been involved in serious human rights violations, including involvement in extrajudicial killings.

³⁹ "In particular, a candidate must not have been convicted of, and must not be under investigation or being prosecuted for, any criminal, human rights or disciplinary offence, with the exception of minor traffic accidents (driving while intoxicated or dangerous or careless driving are not considered minor traffic violations for this purpose)". Assessment of Individual Police Officers for Service in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and Special Political Missions, Hervé Ladsous, USG DPKO 1 February 2012, https://www.police.lk/images/others/un_2015/ams_sop.pdf

⁴⁰ "The background check within United Nations records (see paragraph 16 above) may also yield information on the candidate's conduct in past United Nations assignments including on incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse, in accordance with the DPKO Directives for Disciplinary Matters Involving Civilian Police Officers and Military Observers. A candidate who has been involved in serious misconduct in a previous United Nations assignment will be disqualified from future service in a PKO or SPM". Ibid.

⁴¹ "All of the information gathered by OISL indicates that incidents of sexual violence were not isolated acts but part of a deliberate policy to inflict torture (to obtain information, intimidate, humiliate, inflict fear). The practices followed similar patterns, using similar tools over a wide range of detention locations, time periods, and security forces, reinforcing the conclusion that it was part of an institutional policy within the security forces". (para 591, OISL)

⁴² <https://www.un.org/preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/content/voluntary-compact>

⁴³ UN urged to stop sending Sri Lanka commander for Lebanon peacekeeping, 15 February 2018, JDS,

<http://www.jdslanka.org/index.php/news-features/human-rights/745-un-urged-to-stop-sending-sri-lanka-commander-for-lebanon-peacekeeping>

In addition there are still very serious concerns about lack of criminal accountability for the 134 Sri Lankan peacekeepers sent home in 2007 in connection with allegations of systematic child sexual exploitation in Haiti. Not one individual has spent time behind bars for allegedly raping children. For more please see our joint report with Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka: *Sri Lanka's UN Peacekeepers: Let the Punishment Fit the Crime*⁴⁴.

To our knowledge the only thorough vetting has been carried out in respect of the 200 Sri Lankan peacekeepers deployed to Mali and this was done by OHCHR in Geneva. At one point there was discussion of as many as 3,500 Sri Lankan troops going abroad as peacekeepers. This number requires a better vetting system to "do no harm" to the troop receiving countries whose vulnerable civilians deserve to be protected from sexual predators and alleged war criminals.

⁴⁴ <http://www.itjpsl.com/assets/press/haiti-FINAL.pdf>, ITJP 2018.

2. ITJP TESTIMONY

This section is based primarily on the testimony of Sinhalese security force witnesses many of whom were involved in abductions. Several have confidentially provided the ITJP the names of commanding officers and colleagues. Witnesses also supplied photographs or other documentation or corroboration to show they served in the relevant security force unit, as well as in many cases map coordinates and detailed sketches of torture sites. Their exact units and times of service are not given here as it could reveal their identity.

The witnesses have not met one another and reside in 4 different countries. They have given very detailed accounts of operating procedures that overlap and anecdotes of specific events that would appear to be hard to fabricate on this scale. Clearly much of this detail has been omitted from this report lest it identify the witnesses to their former colleagues. The statements were taken by three different extremely experienced investigators, two of whom worked in the East of Sri Lanka during the war.

It is worth noting some, but not all, of the Sinhalese witnesses are also psychologically damaged by the violence of which they have been a part and were keen to testify to unburden themselves of a strong sense of guilt. One individual in particular was eager, if it were safe, to inform families of the disappeared where the corpses are located that he buried.

2.1 THE EAST

In the East during the war the STF worked very closely with the Tamil paramilitary forces under the control of the breakaway LTTE leader, Col. Karuna. The term “Karuna group⁴⁵” is used widely here to encompass forces loyal to Karuna, Iniyabharathy and Pilliyan, cognizant of the inter-factional rivalries that developed between these leaders from 2007.

The collaboration between the STF and the Karuna group abductions and killings is well documented in the OISL Investigation report which describes abduction and child recruitment as fundamental to the Karuna group’s overall military strategy⁴⁶. An insider witness said the STF used the Karuna group to assassinate Tamil politicians but the STF planned and prepared the killings and were present in the area to ensure all went to plan. The STF however are also

⁴⁵ The Tamil breakaway faction of the LTTE that joined the government as a paramilitary force from 2004 onwards.

⁴⁶ OISL, Para 710.

alleged to have conducted murders for the Karuna faction, wiping out rivals or spreading terror among the population.

At first an STF witness says his senior officers were unhappy about having to work with Karuna's forces and didn't trust them. They also had trouble identifying cadres because they were not in uniform and they didn't know who was with the LTTE or with Karuna. Nevertheless, STF officers were posted to work with the Karuna forces. The Karuna fighters were referred to in walkie talkie communications as "kilo party". Over time, some Karuna units were actually billeted inside STF camps; others built small huts in the outer perimeter of their camps after being told where the STF had planted the claymore mines so they could avoid them.

An STF witness describes the Karuna cadres coming to their camps to collect arms and ammunition - SFG87 grenades, T56 rounds and claymores. Sometimes the STF at the gate would have to call the Karuna group liaison person to ensure they were handing over weapons to the right Tamils since they were difficult to identify.

Intelligence for abductions in Colombo also came from the Karuna group. Indeed security force witnesses say the intelligence from the Tamil group was "extensive and of much better quality" than STF intelligence, leading to a higher success rate in apprehending suspects and an increase in abduction missions to three or four times a week.

STF witnesses describe being ordered not to stop or search members of the Karuna group (or their associated political party, the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP) in the East.

"I saw they boldly carried weapons and moved around armed on bikes. Nobody else would dare openly carrying weapons....In the TMVP camp in Arugam Bay I saw people in detention and boys with weapons who were still not grown up."

A witness said the Officer in Charge (OIC), "told us not to stop or search Karuna's people or to interfere in anything they were doing". The witness alleged his OIC said the instruction for this came from Defence Secretary, Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

On one occasion a witness heard Karuna's men execute a Tamil villager but out of fear did not dare move the body when he later saw it. The witness believed the Tamil paramilitaries had a direct line of communication to the defence secretary which made them more powerful than the STF officials and more feared. In the TMVP camp in XXX (redacted) a witness saw detainees and armed child

soldiers. He added: "I know many of the detainees never came back because the relatives subsequently came to our camp and asked about their loved ones".

2.11 Staged Encounters

An STF insider describes being involved in an assault on a Tamil village believed to harbour the LTTE using heavy machine guns and mortars, causing immense damage. He reports that the STF conducted a false flag operation attacking their own camp as if it had come under fire by the LTTE by firing a few grenades and mortars at their own perimeter. This was intended to deceive the SLMM or Nordic ceasefire monitors in the area into believing the camp had come under LTTE attack. Details of the village and date have been redacted for witness protection reasons.

"Run for you lives" and "if you make it, you make it".

An STF witness describes in detail an incident involving a group of men being detained in an STF camp and then taken out of the camp at night and told to run for their lives. They were shot down while still handcuffed. Previously captured LTTE weapons were then planted on the corpses and the handcuffs removed. The STF radioed in to headquarters claiming they had come under fire. An STF official who is still in a very senior position in Sri Lanka congratulated the team on their work. The witness names and gives the ranks for 10 other participants or witnesses to this killing, not to mention the large number of staff at the base camp who saw the men being detained prior to their execution.

1.12 Abductions, Illegal Detentions and Killings

The STF and Karuna group conducted joint searches with the army in the East and the following witness saw people being abducted and says the STF was informed by the TMVP that they had killed the detainees:

"The STF decided the locations and if anything needed to be clarified during an operation the highest ranking STF officer would be in command, [REDACTED NAME]. The army and the TMVP joined us. The orders we had were not to question Karuna's people. The senior officer would be in phone contact with the SSP [REDACTED NAME], who would decide what to do with each of the persons we apprehended. ..On other occasions, the suspects would be taken away by the TMVP, beaten up, tortured and questioned and then released back to the village again. Sometimes the TMVP killed them, informed the STF about the killing and the STF would not be further involved."

In addition those on guard duty at STF camps described getting orders not to search vehicles belonging to the military with specific license plate numbers. They would just be waived through security: "We received information from our officers in the camp that the army used such vehicles for the purposes of abductions and transporting people to army camps".

Witnesses also described the detention in STF camps of suspects who were then killed:

"We tied their hands behind their backs, gagged them and covered their faces. There were villages around so we had to gag them in order for them not to make loud sounds, crying for help...Once a suspect had been taken to an STF camp, they never got released, they would always be killed."

A member of the STF described witnessing his senior officer executing suspects in the camp:

"I saw the two guys kneeling, hands tied and blindfolded, and from about 3-4 meters I witnessed the [SENIOR OFFICER - NAME REDACTED] standing next to them and shoot them one by one in the head with a T56. The bodies fell forward to the ground. Several STF guys including me witnessed the shooting."

While the bodies were doused in petrol and burned on a fire they all had a meal and a bottle of arrack.

A witness described the assassination of an unarmed former LTTE suspect by a police colleague who then cleaned the blood of his rifle in front of him explaining he had shot the man at very close range in the head: "This was a normal incident, if we got information about suspected LTTE cadres, we would go either in police uniform or mostly in civilian and kill the person. Often we went two constables on a motorcycle in civilian and a pistol."

Another STF witness described the practice of deliberately making Tamil civilians dig in heavily mined areas knowing that they would be killed or injured. He described occasions where a senior officer ordered civilians to do this:

"I was horrified; this man was not armed and was clearly looking for food and was being used like this. A number of personnel had been injured because of the landmines and they knew this area was mined...it was no longer than ten seconds and he was blown up. The man was killed instantly. It was noticeable that no one reacted as one normally would if they heard that. I witnessed another person being killed in this way several days later."

The witness knows where their corpses were buried and can name the officer who gave the order, who was later promoted.

2.3 THE NORTH⁴⁷

An STF insider posted in the North of Sri Lanka in 2009 described being part of an abduction one night; he was told the instructions came from the secretary of defence.

“Arresting people was not unusual for the STF, but what we were doing was somewhat suspicious and unsettling. During the operation the STF members chatted a bit amongst ourselves; we were suspicious, and gathered that this operation was something illegal.”

The involvement of the STF in abducting victims in the North is corroborated by ITJP victim testimony⁴⁸.

2.4 COLOMBO

2.31 The Scale of Abductions

Abductions in “white vans” and disappearances in Colombo and the rest of the island were on a staggering scale in 2007-8, the period described by most of the witnesses here. Some Sri Lankan sources cite 540 cases island-wide from January-August 2007 alone⁴⁹. The sheer scale of the disappearances make it all the more shocking that there has been no accountability whatsoever more than a decade later.

One STF witness involved in the abductions believed military intelligence was responsible for the bulk of white vaning, but that “the STF developed and provided a kind of supplementary role”. He said:

“We never told people we were STF, just that we were police. There was a sense of lots of fragmented activities, but that this was happening under

⁴⁷ The deployment of the STF in the North is confirmed for example in: Living up to optimum expectations, STF’s 27th anniversary on Sept 27, 1 September 2011, The Island, http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=33720

⁴⁸ An ITJP victim (W266) describes being abducted in Vavuniya in 2008 by a group including the STF⁴⁸. The victim says he was taken to Vepankulum Camp and brutally tortured.

In 2009, another Tamil witness says he was abducted from Manik Farm in a dolphin van by 2 men in civilian clothes and one in STF uniform. He was tortured in a series of locations where he says he saw men in STF uniforms⁴⁸.

In 2011, a Tamil man (W257) says he was abducted in the North in a white Dolphin van by CID officers and STF who showed him their ID cards.

⁴⁹ LKA103960.E , 9 February 2012 , Sri Lanka: Treatment of Tamils in Colombo by members of the Sri Lankan security forces and police; registration requirements in Colombo for Tamil citizens (2007- 2008) , Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa , 2.1 Statistics on Abductions and Disappearances

some kind of umbrella command; we received instructions that enabled us to operate without interference and with the cooperation of other security elements.”

Another STF employee involved in interrogations, torture and killing of those abducted, estimates just two teams killed at least 400 people in the time he was with them during the final three years of the war.

It's hard to know to what extent a single STF witness is aware of the activities of other abduction teams even within the STF, let alone those of the navy and military intelligence which we also know operated at the time.

Some STF witnesses involved in abducting suspects say they handed over the victims to other security personnel from the navy, TID or Military Intelligence (MIC) at a variety of locations. This suggests a degree of coordination between different security services in this illegal practice and speaks to the systematic nature of the violations at the time.

2.32 Recruitment

This witness who was involved in abductions says he was told by his team leader he would pick up suspects; journalists, political activists and those opposed to the government:

“The way he explained this didn't arouse suspicion. I did not suspect this would involve illegal activities and thought this would be in the context of routine duties as I had been involved in arrest and handling of suspects before.”

Another says he was warned to keep his activities secret:

“This secrecy included not talking to other colleagues about this or with my family...they explained what we would be doing would not be illegal but would be in the cause of protecting Sri Lanka... I felt this was important work and that I had a real role to play in this fight to neutralise and destroy the LTTE. I was conscious of the security situation and that this work would stop the LTTE from being able to commit atrocities. But even at that point, I was not aware that we would be killing people; I thought that we be arresting and interrogating to bring these people to justice.”

One STF officer, who testified that he personally interrogated and killed victims, was proud to be selected for the role:

“It was not a unit that you could apply to join, our selection was based on years of good work, and obedience to orders no matter what they were. I was

a proud member of the STF; the STF had performed good work in the fight against the LTTE.”

This witness gave the name and rank of the senior officer who recruited him; this individual has been promoted to DIG in the post-war period. He alleged that his Director reported directly to the secretary of defence at the time regarding the abductions.

The disregard for due process was sanctioned from the start. During routine training for deployment, an STF witness said he was given a course in human rights by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). However he says they were ordered to ignore what the ICRC said during the orientation process:

“Our trainers were quite clear that this training was nonsense and that we should really ignore what these people were coming to tell us. Even during the breaks in that training, our regular trainers warned us not to take notice of the ICRC input. They even said this in front of the ICRC interpreters.”

2.33 Victims

STF witnesses say opponents of the government were targeted for abduction – the majority were Tamils but not exclusively – there were also some Sinhalese and Muslim victims. Some were political targets identified from higher up in the security structure – others were identified through the system of informants in the villages the STF patrolled and through informers and the Karuna group. This is how one interrogator saw it:

“The regime had a belief that there were only two types of people – those who supported them to win the war at all costs or those that opposed them. If you were considered an opponent this meant that you were pro-LTTE in their eyes. There were a number of people who spoke out against the government or were critical of the Rajapaksa brothers. These included Tamil politicians (TNA), journalists, both Sinhala and Tamil, and Human Rights campaigners.”

Witnesses also speak to mistakes made in terms of victims abducted.

“On some occasions we would arrest people who were not LTTE, for example they may have known someone in the LTTE but had not realised that the friend was in the LTTE. The problem was once we had arrested them and realised that they were not a member or even knew their friend was a member we could not let them go. So we still killed them, however we would try to do it quickly.”

Another witness alleged: “We received intelligence from the military, both army and navy about targets, and sometimes from the office of the Superintendent of Police.” He was disturbed to be involved in randomly picking people up and handing them over to camps only to find they were killed.

2.34 Abduction Procedure

The abduction procedure is detailed in the OISL report and many ITJP reports – typically one team abducts in a van and another interrogates the victim.

One witness described rehearsing how to abduct an individual off the streets:

“We ‘dry practiced’ at our HQ how to grab people off the street fast and efficiently. Most targets were handcuffed and a bag would be put over their head. In most instances, the targets cried out, in some cases they resisted. In those cases they had to be forcibly restrained.”

Another witness described being in Colombo in 2007-8 and being part of one of several white van abduction teams operating from different sites in the capital:

“Our job was only to take, hold and handover...We moved in a white van, usually a Toyota Hiace and sometimes in a Defender...In most instance, the abductions of targets was routine. It was rare for something unusual to happen like a suspect fighting back.”

One witness said in 2009-10, the STF started changing license plates to hide their illegal activity:

“In this camp there was a white Dolphin van with tinted windows and the STF Intelligence Unit used it to abduct people. Everyone knew the purpose of that van was to abduct people. Every time the van left the camp, the license plate number was changed to a fake one. Intelligence officers took the vehicle out and returned with it empty. They abducted people and took them to other camps.”

2.35 Detention Sites in Colombo

Witness testimony suggests there were multiple illegal/secret detention sites in the capital, let alone in the north and east of the island, and different teams operating independently to abduct victims. One white van team was based at Panagoda⁵⁰. There is no suggestion that those who disappeared in the past are

⁵⁰ Media reports suggest this is where the journalist Prageeth Ekneligoda was initially detained. CID probes Ekneligoda’s previous abduction, 29 August 2015, Sri Lanka Mirror, <http://archive2.srilankamirror.com/news/item/5988-cid-probes-ekneligoda-s-previous-abduction> .

There are also media references to allegations that this camp was used as a place of detention in the past:

still being held at these sites; typically victims were held for no more than a matter of days or at most weeks.

Another witness described mostly working in Colombo and being involved in more than 50 “white van” abductions: “We simply collected and handed over, whether it was a live target or a dead body,” he said. He confirms that he took some of the victims to the Terrorism Investigation Department (TID) where he described seeing dark stains from blood on the walls; other victims were delivered to military sites or navy buildings or transferred to other units:

“In many instances we handed targets over on the road. It wasn't always clear which security service we were handing over to; and after not getting any clarification to questions I asked, I stopped asking. I remember once asking about a case after work, and was bluntly told that the job was done and no questions should be asked.”

The use of STF personnel to deliver abducted suspects to TID headquarters is confirmed by a Tamil detainee in TID who said:

“The STF would do most of the white van abductions and then hand over the detainees to the TID. Parked at the TID detention facility were three white vans (Hiace Delicas) and one grey Benz van. Some detainees would wash these vehicles. Doing this was considered a perk because they got extra food and also it allowed them to have time out of the crowded cells and to do something. I understand that [redacted TID officer's name] had a side business renting vans.”

Another witness said he used a number of secret detention facilities in Colombo for interrogations that were frequently cleaned to destroy any forensic evidence. He prided himself on leaving no trace of the bodies behind, unlike military intelligence whom he disdained for leaving corpses lying around.

In Panadura south of Colombo, there was a torture site with underground cells the location of which the witness has drawn and described in great detail. He said both Tamil and Sinhalese victims were detained there, and tortured with their hands tied and mouths gagged. Some were later taken to Kiran in the East and then killed.

FR case **VINAYAGAMOORTHY, ATTORNEY AT LAW (ON BEHALF OF WIMALENTHIRAN) v. THE ARMY COMMANDER AND OTHERS**, http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/research/srilanka/caselaw/Arrest/Vinayagamoorthy_v_Army_Commander.htm
And A Proposed Amendment To The PTA, Rajan Hoole, 11 february 2017, Colombo Telegraph, <https://srilankatwo.wordpress.com/2017/02/12/a-proposed-amendment-to-the-pta/>
On 14 February 2010, reports say Panagoda was gazetted as a detention site: **Detention centres were gazetted to facilitate administration, say police**, *The Sunday Times*, http://www.sundaytimes.lk/100214/News/nws_16.html
Also in 2009, **DETENTION CENTERS UNDER EMERGENCY REGULATIONS**, <http://www.janasansadaya.org/uploads/files/DETENTION%20CENTERS.pdf>

2.36 Torture and Killing

“We would garrotte, strangle, stab or beat them to death”.

A witness involved in interrogating victims said all of them were eventually killed. They were tortured even if they cooperated in order to ensure they had given up all the information they had. In some cases victims were kept for up to a month and questioned.

“We would hold plastic bags over their heads so that they couldn’t breathe and this would terrorise them to tell us. We would also put bags over their heads and slowly fill it with water so they started to drown. We would pull their nails out with pliers; we would also use electricity on them. We would tie them upside down and attach the current to the penis and increase it until they talked.”

Another witness who collected corpses of detainees to dispose of them said:

“I saw the state of some of the bodies when they were being put on the fires for burning and they had been badly beaten. These bodies were naked. I remember on one occasion seeing something protruding from the anuses of two of these corpses.”

In an incident in Colombo in 2008, a witness says he helped detain a young Tamil man and took him to an STF camp only to be given his corpse a few hours later and ordered to drive it to a camp outside Colombo to dispose of. The witness has given the ITJP the gps coordinates of the building where the man was detained and killed.

“The body in the back was wrapped in plastic, but I was able to take a look, and saw that this was the face of the same young man that we had taken in. His face had been beaten very badly. I travelled in the back of the vehicle with the body.”

3. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

This is the first time the ITJP has published testimony from Sinhalese witnesses and participants in some of the violations – indeed it has taken many years for even a handful of insider witnesses to emerge. The senior officers knowingly sent civilians to dig in mine fields for the “fun” of seeing them blown to pieces or allowed their men to rape women while their husbands waited outside. Even a cursory review (**in Annex 1**) of human rights reporting on Sri Lanka shows that the Special Task Force has a long history of involvement in alleged violations, including torture, abduction and extrajudicial execution. Those who were involved in crimes during the war have now risen to leadership positions within the STF. As a result, no amount of training will remedy this culture of impunity for grave violations which is institutionalised and systemic. It is indicative, for example, that trainees described being instructed by senior officers to disregard ICRC training.

Prosecutions seem a distant prospect in the absence of any political will for accountability in Sri Lanka. In the meantime, a serious vetting procedure to screen out alleged perpetrators is the bare minimum.

Sri Lanka committed in 2015 to vetting its public and security officials but failed utterly to take any steps in this regard. This makes it all the more important that the international community takes the lead and ensures peacekeepers, diplomats and other internationally deployed officials from Sri Lanka are now thoroughly screened for their human rights past. This means putting resources behind this initiative. For the victims, vetting is a long way from justice but it sends a message of hope that there will one day be a reckoning for the past.

Vetting and screening at the level of both Sri Lanka and the UN is completely unsatisfactory. The TCC is supposed to provide the UN with a certificate confirming that those they intend to deploy have not committed, or are alleged to have committed criminal offences and/or violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law⁵¹. However this vetting has not taken place as is evidenced by the recent row between the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka and the military⁵².

There is also a gap when it comes to vetting criteria in those countries where no prosecutions have been undertaken for serious international crimes. This allows for those who may be implicated in crimes to escape any scrutiny. On the

⁵¹ UN Policy - Human Rights Screening of United Nations Personnel, supra note 2, Para. 1.1.

⁵² HRC alleges, Army breached UN peacekeeping protocol, 10 April 2018, The Daily News, <http://dailynews.lk/2018/04/10/local/147982/hrc-alleges-army-breached-un-peacekeeping-protocol>

part of the UN, their screening and vetting has been limited to deployees at a senior position and in most instances has been perceived as not being fully credible. Many Sri Lankan senior military officials have been deployed, raising questions about the UN process. In addition, the Conduct and Discipline Unit process only kicks in while in service.

Lists of more than 30 names of individuals from the STF involved in frontline combat and 24 alleged perpetrators or individuals complicit in grave violations of human rights in the STF have been prepared by the ITJP to be shared with OHCHR and the UN Department of Peacekeeping. A confidential dossier on one individual member of the STF currently serving in Africa as a peacekeeper has been prepared for OHCHR and DPKO; in our opinion this individual should never have passed through the vetting procedure and should immediately be repatriated pending criminal investigation into his past activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the United Nations

1. Members of the Special Task Force with frontline combat experience in the final phase of the war, either in the East from 2006 or the North from 2007, should be barred from deployment as UN peacekeepers. This is in keeping with the OHCHR screening policy for the Sri Lankan military.
2. The UN should make public its vetting and screening procedures under its human rights policy, including the criteria it uses to exclude those recommended for deployment even at a senior level.
3. Given the MoU signed between the Sri Lanka government and the UN with regard to troop deployment including financial support to equipment, the UN should require a stronger commitment on the part of the Sri Lankan Government in the exercise of its due diligence obligations regarding the vetting and screening of the military/police personnel, given the history of the OISL report on violations committed by the STF. The UN should also confirm whether in the case of Sri Lanka it received the necessary certificate in respect of those deployed and whether it reviewed any of the certificates concerned or sent them back in respect of queries raised.
4. The UN should also confirm whether the Conduct and Discipline Unit (CDU) registered any cases regarding Sri Lankan personnel deployed and what measures were taken to address these cases.
5. To advise on the process taken by the UN, including the criteria used, which leads to suspension of an officer to be deployed, as in the case of Lt. Col. Hewage, as well as whether any sanction has been taken up against the Troop Contributing Country (TCC), in this case Sri Lanka, for not ensuring that the vetting and screening were done appropriately.

6. To put in place an alert in respect of personnel in those units identified under the ITJP's suggested criteria (see below) to ensure that they are vetted and screened accordingly.
7. To advise on whether any process has been put in place by the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping (DPKO), the Department of Field Support (DFS) and the Conduct and Discipline Unit (CDU) to ensure that all personnel deployed from Sri Lanka are subjected to a more stringent screening process and if so what that consists of.

To the Government of Sri Lanka and the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka:

1. To make public the procedures, criteria and lines of responsibility for vetting UN peacekeepers being deployed from Sri Lanka.
2. To make public the number of certificates issued and in respect of which deployment of troops to UN Peacekeeping and for which missions as well as the vetting and screening criteria.
3. To make public the process of engagement between the Sri Lankan Military and the HRCSL in terms of the vetting and screening.
4. To make public the measures taken in those instances where complaints have been lodged with the UN or HRCSL leading to a suspension of deployment, as in the case of Lt. Col. Hewage, in order to ensure that there is a transparent follow up procedure and to advise on the outcome of such processes including whether disciplinary and criminal action has followed.

To the International Community:

VETTING FOR DIPLOMATIC POSTS

The ITJP filed lawsuits in Peru, Chile, Brazil and Colombia against Sri Lanka's former Ambassador there, Jagath Jayasuriya. He is only one of a significant number of alleged war criminals posted abroad by the Government of Sri Lanka since 2009 as a reward, hiding behind the cover of diplomatic immunity.

To date there are several more Sri Lankan, ex military figures currently posted as diplomats in Asian countries against whom lawsuits could be filed for war crimes or crimes against humanity if they did not have the protection of their host country.

1. Countries should screen Sri Lankan diplomats, especially military attaches, for their war time record in Sri Lanka, employing the OHCHR vetting criteria used for peacekeepers.
2. The same OHCHR vetting criteria should be adopted publically and transparently by countries that offer training to the Sri Lankan security forces (police and military) as part of security sector reform programmes.

They should be applied to CID and TID as well as STF and the army, navy and air force.

To the Office of Missing Persons in Sri Lanka

This report and that of the OISL describes the role played by the STF in the crime of enforced disappearances. The ITJP recommends therefore that:

1. The OMP investigate the role of the STF in enforced disappearances, as well as that of other security forces.
2. That the OMP calls for the personnel records of STF members and those of the security forces implicated in allegation of enforced disappearances, investigates them and holds specific inquiries which include families of the disappeared, who should be informed of all evidence that becomes available in respect of the whereabouts of their family members.

4. ITJP'S SUGGESTED VETTING CRITERIA

In 2016, when Sri Lankan troops were vetted by OHCHR in Geneva for deployment in Mali as UN peacekeepers, they were screened out if they belonged to a unit named in the OHCHR Investigation into Sri Lanka report (OISL, 2015) and were active at the frontline in 2005-7 and 2007-9, depending on whether it was in the East or North. In addition they were screened out if there were allegations of human rights violations against them, for example, if they were named as an alleged perpetrator in any of the Zonal and All Island Disappearance Commissions in the past.

Below we summarise the implications of basing vetting on the UN's OISL report.

Generally:

1. OISL: "Those cited as being responsible for sexual violence included the whole range of security forces: police (CID, TID); the National Intelligence Bureau, Military Intelligence, SLA soldiers and Navy personnel". [Para 588]
2. OISL: "Acts of torture were perpetrated by State agents from the Sri Lankan Police (SLP), including the Special Task Force (STF), the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), and the Terrorism Investigation Department (TID), the Sri Lankan Army (SLA), particularly the 53rd, 55th and 58th brigades, the Military Police, the Military Intelligence, and the National Intelligence Bureau (NIB)". [Para 54]

Screen out these Units:

These are the military units that were named or implicated by the UN as active in the final phase of the Sri Lankan conflict in the North and the East when grave violations of international humanitarian law were committed.

3. SLA Divisions active in final war: 58⁵³, 53, 55, 59 in the North. Divisions such as 22⁵⁴ and 23⁵⁵ and STF and Military Intelligence in East.
4. SLA Task Forces - OISL says, "According to maps compiled by the Defence Ministry, *Task Forces 2, 3, 4 and 8* were particularly involved in the final weeks of the conflict".
5. Artillery commanders active in 2005-9. Anyone who ordered MBRL or heavy artillery fire in 2009 at civilian objects.

⁵³ OISL mentions this Division in connection with the enforced disappearances of LTTE and their families who surrendered in the Father Francis group.

⁵⁴ Several witnesses interviewed by ITJP reported being tortured in Orr's Hill which is the army camp for 22 Division.

⁵⁵ The presence of several Karuna Group camps in the vicinity of SLA camps and in a few instances within SLA camps, for instance close by the headquarters of the Sri Lanka Army 23rd Division in Welikanda, illustrate that the SLA was fully aware of their presence, and cases of abductions perpetrated by the Karuna Group, often carried out during daylight hours,¹ could not easily have gone unnoticed by the SLA.

6. Personnel involved in flying and monitoring video output from drones and Beechcraft surveillance planes in 2008-9. On several occasions this video was used to direct fire at civilian objects, not avoid them.
7. Military Intelligence (MIC) units active at any time. There is plenty of evidence⁵⁶ of MIC being involved in white van abductions, torture, sexual violence and executions.
8. Airforce: OISL says: Three air squadrons were particularly involved in the conflict:
 - No. 10 Sqn. Operating Kfir ground attack aircraft out of Katunayake AFB;
 - No. 12 Sqn. Operating Mig-27 ground attack aircraft out of Katunayake AFB;
 - No. 111 Sqn. Operating AIA Searcher reconnaissance UAV out of Vavuniya AFB.
9. Sri Lanka Navy: Trincomalee naval intelligence operatives because they've been in charge of intelligence gathering in the east and the Trincomalee High Security Zone torture site. Any naval gunship unit involved in shelling No Fire Zones in 2008-9. Naval intelligence operatives in Colombo and Welisara also ran detention sites.
10. Anyone who worked in CID, TID or MIC based in Joseph Camp (SFHQ - W) when illegal detention, torture and sexual violence occurred⁵⁷.

Screening for Personnel:

Personnel files must be made available to the screening officers, not just the UN PHP forms.

11. Security Force HQ Commanders who served in this role in the North East - OISL says "a Major General having a defined geographical area of responsibility, and a number of different combat Divisions and supporting units under his command".
12. *OISL says "Staff: Each formation from battalion level upwards includes a 'staff' of professional advisers who assist the commander in formulating and executing plans". [OISL,120]. They are complicit in alleged war crimes.*
13. Those commanders active in the forward maintenance area, which was run by the former Army Commander who is now High Commissioner to Dhaka, Bangladesh. The FMA is where captured fighters were taken for initial interrogation.
14. Military and police deployed in Manik Farm or other "IDP camps" post war⁵⁸ where torture and sexual violence repeatedly occurred.

⁵⁶ in OISL and ITJP testimony.

⁵⁷ For more see ITJP's March 2017 Joseph Camp report.

⁵⁸ OISL says Military commanders were in charge of each zone of Manik Farm, and military personnel were present throughout the camps to regulate the everyday life of the IDPs. [Para 1074].

15. Those who administered or worked in a rehabilitation centre post-war (PARCs). Nb. these include some SLA who were in logistics positions (engineering corps) in 2006-9.
16. Anyone involved in an interrogation of an LTTE suspect in rehabilitation or detention from 2008 onwards. This would include multiple wings of the security forces. These detainees did not enjoy any right of appeal and were subjected to mass arbitrary detention, as well as widespread torture and sexual violence.
17. Anyone in the security forces involved in organising a forced abortion or forced contraceptive injections for women detainees.
18. Anyone who worked closely with any of the Tamil paramilitary groups who were involved in the commission of crimes. OISL says the paramilitaries were “reportedly acting alongside, or on behalf of SLA, SLN and STF in particular. In particular 23 Division”⁵⁹.
19. Naval officials in charge of deciding what supplies were sent by ship to the Vanni in 2009. These officials were involved in the denial of food and medicine to civilians.
20. Security personnel in charge of deciding to move the reception area for medical evacuations from Trincomalee town to Pulmoddai, something which unnecessarily caused deaths and immense human suffering.
21. TID/CID: anyone who served at 4th/6th floor detention facility, Boosa, or any other legal or illegal detention site known for torture.
22. Those officers who refuse to give information in their possession to court proceedings⁶⁰.

⁵⁹ The presence of several Karuna Group camps in the vicinity of SLA camps and in a few instances within SLA camps, for instance close by the headquarters of the Sri Lanka Army 23rd Division in Welikanda, illustrate that the SLA was fully aware of their presence, and cases of abductions perpetrated by the Karuna Group, often carried out during daylight hours, could not easily have gone unnoticed by the SLA.

⁶⁰ EG: <http://www.dailymirror.lk/105674/Court-calls-for-list-of-LTTE-surrendees-in-Mullaitivu> - The General Officer Commanding (GOC), 58th Division of the Sri Lanka Army, Major General Kavinda Chanakya Gunawardena - <http://www.jdslanka.org/index.php/news-features/human-rights/592-sri-lanka-admits-having-a-record-of-tamil-rebels-surrendered>

ANNEX 1 – HUMAN RIGHTS REPORTING ON THE STF

1.1 THE UNITED NATIONS

1998 UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions

“On 17 May 1985, 23 young men from Naipattimunai, Amparai district, were allegedly arrested by Special Task Force (STF) personnel from Kallady camp and made to dig their own grave. Subsequently, they were allegedly shot... Although a lot of evidence was available at the time about the arrests and subsequent disappearances by the STF, the police did not make any further attempts to investigate the incident⁶¹.”

2002 UN Special Rapporteur on torture

On 2 September 2002, the Special Rapporteur advised the Government of Sri Lanka that he had received information according to which there was an apparent rise in reports of torture and other forms of ill-treatment involving personnel of the Special Task Force (STF) deployed in the North and East of Sri Lanka. He cited 7 specific cases involving the STF⁶². These involved torture such as the application of electric shocks, beatings, asphyxiation with a bag soaked in petrol, water torture, chilli applied to the genitals or eye, rape and sexual violence.

⁶¹ E/CN.4/1998/68/Add.2 <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G98/109/17/PDF/G9810917.pdf?OpenElement>

⁶² 199. Rajaratnam Thevaratnam, The STF personnel reportedly applied chilli to his genitals and administered electric shocks.

1527. A man known as "old father" was allegedly arrested by STF of Thirukovil, on 3 May 2000. It was alleged that his buttocks were severely beaten with a dried bull's penis and he was also beaten with a pole all over his body. He was then reportedly handed over to the Amparai CSU, where the policemen removed his shirt and banian (men's underwear), and tied his hands with it, pushed him down and then beat him with a pole on his soles as a result of which he had difficulties in walking and lost his sight.

1495. Sivalingam Satheskumar, a man from Thirukovil, Amparai district, was reportedly taken into custody by the STF on 16 May 2001 and held at the Thirukovil STF Camp. Soon after taking him into custody, STF officers reportedly pulled a shopping bag soaked in petrol over his face and assaulted him at the same time. They also reportedly put water and then chilli powder into his eyes. He was also allegedly suspended between two tables and assaulted with wicket poles while hanging between them. More than two months after having been subjected to this treatment, he reportedly continued to have marks of the beatings on his back and on his thigh.

1493. Ponnappapillai Sivanesan, a man originally from Chulipuram, Jaffna district, but living as a displaced person at Ilanthaimodai, Mannar district, was allegedly assaulted in his home and taken into custody by the STF to the Ilanthaimodai STF camp on 25 June 2001. His wife and three children were allegedly also assaulted by them at the time of his arrest. It was reported that he had been released in the afternoon of 26 June 2001 with a severe warning not to go to any hospital for treatment. He was reportedly admitted at the Mannar hospital, before being transferred to Vavuniya hospital.

1491. Alagaiah Murugathas, a man from Vinayagapuram, Thirukovil, Amparai district, was reportedly arrested by the STF on 30 June 2001. The latter reportedly pulled a plastic shopping bag over his head which had been filled with petrol, put chilli powder into his eyes and beat him with wicket poles all over his body. Eight STF personnel reportedly stood on his chest. After he was handed over to the Special Investigation Branch of the police at Amparai town, he was allegedly beaten with a wooden pole all over his body by a police constable. Alagaiah Murugathas was reportedly seen with marks of severe injuries allegedly due to the treatment he had been subjected to on his back and thigh and red marks in his eyes, suspected of having been caused by the petrol and/or the chilli powder.

1611. A mother of two children was reportedly raped by a STF commando at Cheddipaalayam in Batticaloa district, on 5 February 2001. According to the reports, the woman was collecting firewood when she was raped by a member of the STF. It is alleged that he had also threatened to kill her, if she complained to anyone. She was reportedly admitted to Batticaloa Hospital. The suspect who is said to be attached to Cheddipaalayam STF camp, whose name is known to the Special Rapporteur, was reportedly arrested by the police and produced before the Batticaloa District Judge.

1603. Mahendiran Nageswari was reportedly sexually abused by personnel attached to the STF camp at Kaluthawalai in April 2001. She was later admitted to the Batticaloa teaching hospital. The matter was alleged to have been reported to the Kaluwanchikudy police station for inquiries

OHCHR Investigation into Sri Lanka, (OISL, 2015)

The following references in the UN report pertain to the conduct of the STF:

White Van Abductions

OISL (Para 346): "In most of the [white van abduction] cases documented by OISL, unlawful and arbitrary arrests were carried out by members of the security forces, including CID, TID, STF, members of SLA (especially Military Intelligence) and SLN."

Enforced Disappearance

OISL (412): "According to WGEID reports of 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010, the Sri Lankan Army, the police (CID, TID, STF) and paramilitary groups were allegedly responsible for the majority of the cases of enforced disappearances."

Torture

OISL (544): "Acts of torture were perpetrated by State agents from the Sri Lankan Police (SLP), including the Special Task Force (STF)..."

In addition the OISL report details the links between the STF and the Tamil paramilitary forces run by Colonel Karuna who split from the LTTE in 2004 and went on to become a government minister.

OISL (425): "By October 2006, according to the information available to OISL, there was growing collaboration between the Karuna Group, the STF and the SLA in Batticaloa and Ampara. Numerous cases in Batticaloa from 2005 and 2006 also point to persistent cases of the Karuna Group using white vans to abduct people - including children - from public places in front of SLA camps or checkpoints..."

OISL (428): "In October 2006, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions and international observers found increasingly strong indications of collaboration between the Karuna Group and the security forces, particularly the Special Task Force (STF) of the police and in some cases, between the Military Intelligence and the Karuna Group."

OISL (1117): "The nature and extent of the collaboration between paramilitary groups, in particular the Karuna Group and different branches of the security forces, including the Army's Special Operations units, the Intelligence branches of the military, and the STF of the police, is of great concern and must be further investigated. Persistent but unverified allegations that killings as well as disappearances were ordered by senior

government officials should be part of that investigation, particularly in terms of chain of command responsibilities.”

Furthermore the UN found grounds to say the STF were involved in the killing of five Tamil university students near the Trincomalee beach on 2 January 2006, a case for which there has still been no accountability:

Trinco 5 Case

OISL (272): “Based on the information collected by OISL, there are reasonable grounds to believe that security force personnel, including STF personnel, killed the five students.”

This is one of the incidents, which was investigated by the International Independent Eminent Persons Group (IIGEP) whose reports detail the systematic subversion of the judicial process by figures who today remain in key positions of authority.

1.2 NGO REPORTS

The University Teachers for Human Rights, Jaffna reported that from its deployment in early 1985, the STF “quickly earned notoriety as ruthless and lawless” and was allegedly involved in a number of massacres⁶³.

Human Rights Watch said as the fighting spread to the east in 1990 the numbers of Tamil men “disappeared reached thousands within months” most of whom “disappeared” after being detained during cordon-and-search operations conducted by the army, often in conjunction with the police, and particularly the elite Special Task Force (STF)⁶⁴. It said the STF “became notorious for its human rights violations, including “disappearances” and extrajudicial killings. It added that “The Sri Lankan Commission of Inquiry into Involuntary Removal or Disappearance of Persons in the Northern and Eastern Provinces concluded in 1997 that the STF was the arresting agency in 5 percent of 1,219 reported cases of “disappearances” in the Batticaloa district in North Eastern province between 1988 and 1996”.

1984

As early as September 1984, a telex from British diplomats reported that “Ten civilians were shot dead by *police commandos*” in Point Pedro, a clear reference to the STF⁶⁵.

⁶³ The group cited the “Thambattai massacre, the Kokkadichcholai massacre in 1987, the scores of headless bodies in 1990, victims strangled at the STF HQ in Jaffna in 1995 and the Pottuvil massacre in 2006,” UTHR, J, <http://www.uthr.org/SpecialReports/Spreport30.htm>

⁶⁴ **Recurring Nightmare**, State Responsibility for “Disappearances” and Abductions in Sri Lanka. March 2008, HRW, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/03/05/recurring-nightmare/state-responsibility-disappearances-and-abductions-sri-lanka>

⁶⁵http://www.jdslanka.org/images/art_img/news_features/politics_current_affairs/british_embassy_cable.jp

1987

The massacre of 150 civilians, nearly all Tamils, by the Special Task Force (STF) after 13 STF personnel had been killed at Kokkaddicholai in January 1987⁶⁶.

1995

STF personnel were arrested in connection with 20 corpses of Tamils discovered in the Lake in Colombo⁶⁷.

Amnesty International reported that three young Tamil men were allegedly detained by the STF in the capital Colombo between 4 June and 14 June 1995 and may have been killed in custody and their bodies disposed of in secret⁶⁸.

The US State Department reported that police (mostly STF officers) and army personnel committed at least 17 extrajudicial killings of civilians in the Eastern Province after April. Several of the killings occurred during cordon and search operations by the STF⁶⁹.

2006 Trincomalee 5 Killings

A plethora of evidence and statements points to this massacre of 5 young students on the Trincomalee beach being carried out by the STF and those in command even being identified. However the families have yet to see justice⁷⁰. Witnesses gave the International Independent Group of Eminent Parsons or IIGEP, "clear evidence that members of the STF were the killers and that they and their families were threatened and intimidated by security forces shortly after killings and woundings to keep their mouths shut⁷¹". The IIGEP final confidential donor report states that (i) "members of the STF, led by a named individual, immediately attended the crime scene and 5 of the youths were then murdered by automatic gunfire by the STF; and (ii) that the actions of the STF were planned and deliberate and (iii) that members of the Police knew at first instance that the STF were the killers. The involvement of the STF in this incident is further corroborated by Amnesty International⁷² and the US State

⁶⁶ The 1987 Kokkaddicholai Massacre centred on a prawn farm. "Seven of those killed were aged 12 years old", according to the North-East Secretariat on Human Rights (NESOHR NESHOR, Massacres of Tamils 1956-2008, (Manitham: Chennai, 2010), as quoted by JDS.

⁶⁷ University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) Sri Lanka UTHR(J) Special Report No. 26, 3rd August 2007, Can the East be won through Human Culling? Special Economic Zones - An Ideological Journey Back to 1983, <http://www.uthr.org/SpecialReports/spreport26.htm>,

Also: Sri Lanka: Information on the situation of newly-arrived Tamils to Colombo since the breakdown of the ceasefire; and on their treatment by the authorities, Canadian Immigration, 1995, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6aaa83e.html>

⁶⁸ Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/176000/asa370161995en.pdf> UN SPECIAL

⁶⁹ Sri Lanka Human Rights Practices, 1995, U.S. Department of State, March 1996, http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/democracy/1995_hrp_report/95hrp_report_sasia/SriLanka.html

⁷⁰ "The special rapporteur appointed by the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, T. Suntheralingam, clearly said "it was not the LTTE that committed the crime but members of the STF". He identified those then in command of those forces that were behind it," ACCORDING TO: IIGEP Final Donors Report, 7 April 2009.

⁷¹ Ibid, Page 22.

⁷² AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, SRI LANKA'S ASSAULT ON DISSENT, 2013, https://www.amnesty.nl/content/uploads/2016/11/assault_on_dissent_final_clean.pdf?x31772

Department human rights report⁷³ and even the then Sri Lankan President's brother, Basil Rajapaksa, according to Wikileaks⁷⁴.

Action Contre la Faim

Seventeen Action Contra la Faim (ACF) aid workers were killed in Muttur in August 2006. ACF said its workers had been lined up, forced to kneel and each shot in the head. SLMM blamed the security forces⁷⁵. Amnesty said witnesses were threatened by the STF⁷⁶. OISL (236) said: "The international forensic pathologist appointed to oversee a second autopsy was harassed and retracted his finding that a bullet likely to be from a STF weapon was lodged in the skull of one of the victims". UTHR(J) identified police constables, and members of the Muslim Home Guard and Special Task Force by name.

2006 Pottuvil Massacre

On 17 September 2006, ten Muslim labourers were found hacked to death near an STF camp, in Pottuvil. Responsibility for the attack remains contested. The local Muslim community considered the STF as the most likely perpetrators, while the Government blamed the LTTE⁷⁷. An ITJP witness says it was the Karuna forces but STF gave them the weapons and the nearest STF camp OIC was ordered not to go out on patrol that night, indicating the attack was pre planned.

2006 Nadarajah Raviraj Murder

On 10 November 2006, the human rights lawyer and MP for the Tamil National Alliance was shot dead on a main road in Colombo by an assailant on a motorbike. One witness says the STF did the planning and surveillance for the assassination, identifying a suitable spot where the victim's security would be weak. The Karuna forces are also alleged to have been involved in this incident⁷⁸. Earlier there had been media reports that some suspects had fled to Switzerland⁷⁹. In December 2017, all the suspects in the court case were acquitted⁸⁰.

⁷³ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2006, March 6, 2007 <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78875.htm>

⁷⁴ 'Speaking with surprising candor, Rajapaksa explained the GSL's efforts to prove that members of the Security Task Force (STF) murdered five students in Trincomalee in January: "We know the STF did it, but the bullet and gun evidence shows that they did not. They must have separate guns when they want to kill some one. We need forensic experts."' from https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06COLOMBO1622_a.html

⁷⁵ Sri Lanka war taking tragic civilian toll, 23 Oct 2006, Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/archive/2006/10/2008410151917194734.html>

⁷⁶ "The STF gave him many calls and he feared for his life and told me not to reveal anything in the courts, saying that they would shoot us." Assault on Dissent, 2013, https://www.amnesty.nl/content/uploads/2016/11/assault_on_dissent_final_clean.pdf?x31772

⁷⁷ OISL para 271.

Also UNIVERSITY TEACHERS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (JAFFNA) SRI LANKA, UTHR(J), Special Report No: 34, 13th December 2009, Let Them Speak: Truth about Sri Lanka's Victims of War.

⁷⁸ "According to a former police constable who turned state witness, who claimed that former Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa "had arranged a payment of Rs. 50 million to the Karuna faction to murder the MP" from:

Sumanthiran says SIS was accused of killing Raviraj, 26 December 2016, Colombo Gazette, <http://colombogazette.com/2016/12/26/sumanthiran-says-sis-was-accused-of-killing-raviraj/>

Also: WikiLeaks: Pararajasingham And Raviraj Killings; Karuna And Douglas Killing MPs - EPDP Vigneswaran To US, 13 September 2013, Colombo Telegraph, <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/wikileaks-pararajasingham-and-raviraj-killings-karuna-and-douglas-killing-mps-epdp-vigneswaran-to-us/>

Raviraj Killing: No Approval To Arrest Two Suspects, Sunday Leader, 8 January 2017, <http://www.thesundayleader.lk/2017/01/08/raviraj-killing-no-approval-to-arrest-two-suspects/>

⁷⁹ Raviraj killer Charan's file stolen?, 17 August 2016, <http://archive2.srilankamirror.com/news/item/12142-raviraj-killer-charan-s-file-stolen>

2009 CHRD Manager Abducted

Mr. Stephen Sinnavan Sunthararaj was abducted by armed men on 7 May 2009 and disappeared. This human rights defender was the Project Manager at the Centre for Human Rights and Development (CHRD). On February 12, 2009, members of the Special Task Force (STF) had tried to force him into a van as he was leaving his office⁸¹.

2012 Vavuniya Jail incident

On 29th June 2012, 32 Tamil prisoners in the Vavuniya Prison were brutally assaulted by the STF after an agitation staged by them inside the Prison. Two prisoners later died of their injuries⁸². One of the officers allegedly involved in commanding the assault is now a UN peacekeeper.

2013

Amnesty International reported that a clash between prisoners and STF members at Welikada prison on 9 November resulted in twenty-seven inmates dying. The result of an official inquiry into allegations that some prisoners were extra judicially executed was not made public.

Amnesty also reported on the killing of Antony Warnakulasuriya and three others who were wounded when the STF fired live ammunition into a crowd of people from a fishing community who were protesting against fuel price increases outside Chilaw⁸³.

Amnesty reported on threats against several prominent lawyers in Sri Lanka, including J.C. Weliamuna, whom media reports said was being targeted for assassination by someone recently released from prison collaborating with a group composed of STF and members of the President's Security Division⁸⁴.

2017

The Asian Human Rights Commission reported on the death of a Tamil boy who was killed during a police chase by the STF⁸⁵.

Did Pillayan kill Raviraj? CID seeks Swiss assistance to arrest main suspect Charan; Gun that killed former MP passed on to Charan by Pillayan, 29 October 2015, The Daily News, <http://www.dailynews.lk/?q=local/did-pillayan-kill-raviraj>

CID Files Case Against Raviraj Killers, 3 November 2015, Colombo Telegraph, <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/cid-files-case-against-raviraj-killers/>

⁸⁰ All Suspects of Nadaraja RaviRaj killing Acquitted from Charges, 24 December 2016, Hiru News, <http://www.hirunews.lk/150450/all-suspects-nadaraja-raviraj-killing-acquitted-from-chargers>

⁸¹ SRI LANKA: Ongoing enforced disappearance of Mr. Sinnavan Stephen Sunthararaj, April 2012, FIACAT, <http://www.fiacat.org/sri-lanka-ongoing-enforced-disappearance-of-mr-sinnavan-stephen-sunthararaj>

⁸² Sri Lanka: Human rights abuses in prison - assaults, torture and custodial death, A/HRC/21/NGO/69
Tamil Political Prisoners in Sri Lanka, March 2013, By N.Sivathasan, <https://www.srilankacampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/tamil-political-prisoners-in-sri-lanka-final.pdf>

⁸³ Demand justice in Sri Lanka, Annual report 2013, Amnesty International USA, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/pdfs/SriLankaToolkitSummer2014.pdf>

⁸⁴ Amnesty International, SRI LANKA'S ASSAULT ON DISSENT, https://www.amnesty.nl/content/uploads/2016/11/assault_on_dissent_final_clean.pdf?x31772

⁸⁵ Asian Human Rights Commission urges action over Tamil boy killed by Sri Lanka's STF, 11 August 2017, Tamil Guardian, <http://www.tamilguardian.com/content/asian-human-rights-commission-urges-action-over-tamil-boy-killed-sri-lankas-stf>

2018

In March 2018, during the anti-Muslim violence that erupted there have been multiple media reports that the STF participated in or abetted the assaults on Muslims, including desecrating mosques⁸⁶. Reuters news agency reported that victims and witnesses, whose accounts were partly backed by CCTV footage, described members of the STF assaulting Muslim cleric and leaders⁸⁷.

⁸⁶ Video: British trained elite police brutality against Muslim clerics during riots, 20 March 2018, JDS, <http://www.jdslanka.org/index.php/news-features/human-rights/765-stf-violence-against-muslim-clerics> ; Also on video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_75b0IVFbfc&feature=youtu.be
State medics refuse treating Muslim assaulted by Sri Lanka elite police unit, JDS, 13 March 2018, <http://www.jdslanka.org/index.php/news-features/human-rights/760-government-medics-refuse-treating-muslim-assaulted-by-sri-lanka-elite-police-unit>


⁸⁷ Police, politicians accused of joining Sri Lanka's anti-Muslim riots, 25 March 2018, Reuters, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-sri-lanka-clashes-insight/police-politicians-accused-of-joining-sri-lankas-anti-muslim-riots-idUKKBN1H1020>

“WHITE VAN” ABDUCTORS

THIS WORK IN THE WHITE VANNING UNIT HAD BEEN LIKE BEING A HORROR FILM. THIS LIFESTYLE HAD BECOME PART OF MY NORMAL LIFE. WE WERE SURROUNDED BY VIOLENCE, CORRUPTION, FEAR, ANGER AND HATRED. LIFE WAS VERY CHEAP.

IN THE PERIOD OF TIME THAT I WAS IN THIS TEAM, I ESTIMATE THE NUMBER OF PERSONS ABDUCTED AND KILLED BY THE TWO TEAMS WAS A MINIMUM OF 400. ON OCCASIONS, IF WE COULD NOT ABDUCT THE ACTUAL PERSON, WE WOULD DISAPPEAR A FAMILY MEMBER TO SEND THE SAME MESSAGE.

IN THIS CAMP THERE WAS A WHITE DOLPHIN VAN WITH TINTED WINDOWS AND THE STF INTELLIGENCE UNIT USED IT TO ABDUCT PEOPLE. EVERYONE KNEW THE PURPOSE OF THAT VAN WAS TO ABDUCT PEOPLE.



The International Truth and Justice Project was established in 2013 in response to emerging evidence regarding war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Sri Lanka - both during the final phase of the civil war in 2009 - and its aftermath. The ITJP specialises in documentation regarding torture and sexual violence. In 2017 it brought 4 lawsuits under universal jurisdiction against a retired Sri Lankan General in Latin America.

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