

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 19, 2022

The Honorable Anthony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

As Co-chairs of the Congressional Caucus on Ethnic and Religious Freedom in Sri Lanka, we write regarding the tumultuous situation in Sri Lanka, and the opportunity it presents to encourage the Sri Lankan people to advance reforms that will put Sri Lanka on a path towards greater fiscal stability and equality for all Sri Lankans. Now is a critical time to ensure the rights of Sri Lanka's ethnic and religious minorities are fully restored and upheld.

As you know, last week Sri Lanka's President, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, fled the country and resigned. This is a culmination of months of protests over Sri Lanka's fiscal crisis, which has resulted in Sri Lanka's inability to repay its debt and shortages in essential food items, fuel and medicine for its citizens. It is vital that a new leader be elected who will follow the rule of law and make the difficult decisions needed to return Sri Lanka to fiscal stability.

However, the resignation of President Rajapaksa means much more for Sri Lanka's ethnic minorities, and particularly the Tamil people, who have seen no progress towards the promised reconciliation of past war crimes – some alleged to have been perpetrated by the President, himself – and an increase in assaults on their civil and human rights under a Rajapaksa government. If Sri Lanka is to see real and lasting change, it is critical that a new leader not only work to restore Sri Lanka's fiscal health, but to also work towards the promised transitional justice and reforms that will respect the rights of all Sri Lankans, ending the cycles of violence and ethnic conflict.

Accordingly, we encourage the U.S. State Department to support any efforts of a newly formed government in Sri Lanka to undertake the following actions:

- Draft a new constitution that genuinely restructures the state in a way that respects the secular and pluri-national nature of the island and the right to self-determination, and meaningfully devolves political, economic, land and security powers;
- Ratify the Rome Statute with retroactive effect, and support international prosecutions of atrocity crimes committed during and after Sri Lanka's long and brutal civil war;
- Demilitarize the North-East to support restructuring the economy by cutting the inflated defense budget, and reallocating spending for economic development;
- Address demands of long-standing protests by families of the disappeared and political prisoners from across the North-East, including as a starting point by repealing the Prevention Terrorism Act (PTA);
- Immediately cease land acquisitions by national authorities and security forces in the North-East.

Thank you for your leadership and your consideration of these concerns and suggestions for ensuring Sri Lanka returns to a path towards fiscal stability and equality for all Sri Lankans.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Bill Johnson in black ink, written in a cursive style.

Bill Johnson
Member of Congress

Handwritten signature of Danny K. Davis in black ink, written in a cursive style.

Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress