

US exploits UNHRC resolution to pressure Sri Lanka

By Sarath Kumara
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The US is proposing a resolution on Sri Lanka in the current session of the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC), which started last week. While the Sri Lankan government has opposed the move, the resolution will do nothing to address the war crimes and gross abuses of democratic rights by the military in the final stages of the island's civil war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The draft resolution calls on the Sri Lankan government to implement the recommendations of its own Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), as well as initiate credible investigations into allegations of human rights breaches not addressed by the LLRC report.

The Colombo government's opposition to carrying out the recommendations of its own inquiry underlines the fact that the LLRC was a sham inquiry designed to cover up human rights abuses and deflect demands for an independent international investigation into war crimes. President Mahinda Rajapakse handpicked the commissioners to ensure no genuine inquiry took place.

Such was the scope of the war crimes that the LLRC could not endorse the government's lie that no civilians had been killed by the military. The LLRC concluded, however, that any civilian deaths were accidental and blamed the LTTE for preventing people from leaving territory under its control.

The LLRC findings contradicted international reports, including from an expert committee appointed by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. The UN panel found "credible evidence" of war crimes that implicated the government, senior state officials and top military commanders. It concluded that the Sri Lankan military had killed tens of thousands of civilians in the final months of the war to May 2009, including by deliberate attacks on hospitals and aid

posts.

While most of the LLRC's recommendations amounted to platitudes, it did go further than the government wanted. It called for "a political solution" that would involve devolving limited powers to sections of the Tamil elite in the North and East, the de-militarisation of civilian affairs in the former war zones and an investigation into extra-judicial killings and enforced disappearances.

The US resolution calls for the Sri Lankan government to "accept advice and technical assistance" in implementing these steps and present a "concrete and comprehensive action plan" before the next UNHRC session. It effectively offers Colombo a way of ending international criticism and the danger of government leaders facing war crimes trials.

The Obama administration is pushing the resolution as a means of pressuring the Rajapakse government to accommodate US interests and those of India, which has also been demanding the implementation of the LLRC recommendations. New Delhi is pushing for a "political solution"—that is, a power-sharing arrangement between the island's Sinhala and Tamil elites—to contain the anger in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu over the treatment of Tamils in Sri Lanka.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton wrote to her Sri Lankan counterpart in January, pointing out that the LLRC recommendations were not being implemented. In February, US Undersecretary of State Maria Otero and Assistant Secretary of State Robert O. Blake visited Colombo. Otero announced that President Rajapakse had been informed that Washington planned to bring a resolution to the UNHRC session.

Washington, which backed Rajapakse's war against the LTTE, is no more concerned about human rights in

Sri Lanka than in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. For the Obama administration, the issue is a convenient device to put pressure on Colombo to shift away from the closer diplomatic and economic ties established with Beijing.

In May 2009, after the defeat of the LTTE, the US supported European countries in putting a resolution to the UNHRC on human rights in Sri Lanka. The resolution was defeated after Sri Lanka obtained the support of China, Russia and India, as well as other countries.

Addressing the latest UNHRC plenum, Mahinda Samarasinghe, the head of the Sri Lankan delegation, falsely declared that an internal accountability process was already underway on the LLRC recommendations and called for more time to deal with the issues.

To dampen criticism, Sri Lanka's army commander, Lieutenant General Jagath Jayasuriya, recently appointed a five-member court of inquiry to examine the LLRC report on the civilian casualties and to probe a British-based Channel-4 documentary, *Sri Lanka Killing Fields*. Previously, the government and military had dismissed the one-hour video, which provides graphic details of war crimes.

At the same time, Sri Lanka is lobbying heavily behind the scene against the US-backed resolution. It appears to have the support of China and Russia, but India has not declared its hand. New Delhi is seeking to boost its influence in Sri Lanka, but is also concerned about the political impact in Tamil Nadu of rejecting the resolution.

At the same time, the Sri Lankan government has mounted a hysterical campaign at home against the supposed "international conspiracy" to tarnish the country's name. The propaganda barrage is aimed at silencing any opposition, including the mounting strikes and protests by workers, by branding it as part of the agenda of this so-called conspiracy.

Nishantha Warnasinghe, leader of the Sinhala extremist Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), told the BBC that his party opposed any concessions to Washington and opposed the establishment of the military court of inquiry. The JHU is part of Rajapakse's ruling coalition.

The opposition United National Party (UNP), which backed Rajapakse's war against the LTTE and defended the military's crimes, is seeking an

accommodation with Washington. UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe has called for consensus between the government and the opposition on the implementation of the LLRC recommendations.

The bourgeois Tamil National Alliance (TNA) is likewise manoeuvring. It previously condemned the LLRC report, but now calls for the implementation of its recommendations—in line with Washington and New Delhi. The TNA is desperately seeking US and Indian backing for a "political solution", from which it hopes to benefit.

The Socialist Equality Party rejects both the phony US-backed resolution and the Rajapakse government's chauvinist campaign against it. None of the Sri Lankan parties, including the various Tamil opposition parties, or the imperialist powers, has even condemned the atrocities for which the government and military are responsible. Only the working class, in a unified struggle for a workers' and peasants' government and socialist policies, can defend the most basic democratic rights and address these horrific war crimes.

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