SRI LANKA COUNTRY INFORMATION

REPORT NO. 17

October 24th, 2025

Combined Refugee Action Group, Geelong, Victoria
For further information, contact: combinedrefugeeactiongroup@gmail.com

The Combined Refugee Action Group is a network group that brings together people from a variety of backgrounds across the Geelong region in Victoria, (Refugee Support Groups, Church and Community Groups, Unions, Political Groups, Social Justice and Social Action Groups, students, and individuals). We are united by the shared aim of advocating for just, humane, and welcoming policies towards refugees and people seeking asylum.

Table of Contents

Purpose **3**

Introduction **5**

Rajapaksa family **7**

Ranil Wickremesinghe **10**

Anura Kumara Dissanayake **16**

Legislative changes for greater control **20**

Sri Lanka – a criminal state **28**

Attacks on journalists, lawyers & human rights organisations **30**

Attacks against journalists 34

Attacks against Lawyers and Judges 38

Forced disappearances **40**

Families of the Disappeared 40

Mass Graves and Failed Exhumations 46

The situation for Tamils **47**

Banning of public commemorations for Tamils killed during the civil war: 52

Arbitrary Administrative Detention: 57

Increased use of the military 58

Abductions, Killings and Death Threats 59

Torture and excessive use of force by police and security forces: 63

Intensified surveillance and harassment: 68

Tamil marginalization in state institutions and committees: 76

Seizing of historical Tamil lands: 77

Harassment of Tamils with perceived links to the LTTE: 82

Continuing and intensifying oppression against Tamils: 84

Ban imposed on organisations and individuals 87

Election violence and intimidation **89**

November 2019 Presidential Election 89

August 2020 General Parliamentary Election 91

2024 Election Violence and Intimidation 94

September 2024 Presidential Election 94

November 2024 General Election 95

May 2025 Local Government Elections 97

Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) **98**

Returned Asylum Seekers **105**

UK Upper Tribunal judges reject Australian DFAT country report used as a basis to determine asylum applications for Sri Lankan Tamils 107

Treatment of Returnees and Failed Asylum Seekers 109

Citation:

Combined Refugee Action Group (October 24th, 2025). ***Sri Lanka Country Information Report No. 17.*** http://craggeelong.com/

Purpose

This Country Information Report outlines changes in political and social context that make it unsafe for Tamil people seeking asylum in Australia to be returned to Sri Lanka. The report covers the period from October 2019 to October 24th, 2025.

This referenced report fills a critical gap for decision-makers and public officials. The report considers the latest available information from a range of Sri Lankan news publications, international media coverage, United Nations reports, and reports published by human rights groups, and on-ground citizen journalists. It provides detail behind the information given in the CRAG Briefing Note on Sri Lanka.

Taken together, these various information sources demonstrate the significant risk to personal safety faced by Tamils if returned to Sri Lanka, and that by doing so the Australian Government would be breaching the rules of non-refoulement.

The Australian Government DFAT Country Information Report -Sri Lanka (May 02, 2024)[1] states that *"it has been prepared by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) for protection status determination purposes only. The report provides a general, rather than exhaustive, country overview. The report does not contain policy guidance for decision makers."*

Ministerial Direction 84 of 24 June 2019, issued under section 499 of the Migration Act (1958), states:
"Where the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has prepared [a] country information assessment expressly for protection status determination purposes, and that assessment is available to the decision maker, the decision maker must take into account that assessment, where relevant, in making their decision. The decision maker is not precluded from considering other relevant information about the country." [2]

In a landmark immigration case in the United Kingdom in May 2021, three Upper Tribunal judges were scathing in their rejection of the Australian DFAT country reports previously used as a basis to determine asylum applications for Sri Lankan Tamils. The Tribunal said that:

"In addition to taking account of open source materials such as the US Department of State human rights reports, DFAT is based on "on-the-ground knowledge and discussions with a range of sources in Sri Lanka. However, none of the sources are identified, there is no explanation as to how the information from these sources

[1] **Australian Government DFAT Country Information Report Sri Lanka. May 02, 2024. Paragraphs 1.1 & 1.2.** https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/country-information-report-sri-lanka.pdf

[2] **Australian Government DFAT Country Information Report Sri Lanka. May 02, 2024. Paragraph 1.3.** https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/country-information-report-sri-lanka.pdf

was obtained, and there is no annex containing, for example, records of any interviews." [3]
The Tribunal noted that:
"Indeed, it is unclear whether any formal interviews took place. The report does not provide direct quotes from any source. In light of these matters, it is difficult to gauge the reliability of the sources which have informed the "judgement and assessment" applied to them by the authors of the report." [4]

The May 2024 version of the DFAT Country Information Report - Sri Lanka does not address these issues. The lack of detailed references continues to undermine the accuracy and transparency of the report and the reliability of the sources which inform DFAT's judgement and assessment. It should be noted that information provided to DFAT which forms the context of the DFAT Report on Sri Lanka, reportedly emanates from many sources, however the Government of Sri Lanka or its government-sponsored instrumentalities are not listed. Given the close alliance between the Australian Government and the Sri Lankan Government, this omission by DFAT is highly questionable.

While the May 2024 DFAT Country Information Report does reference reports from the UN Special Rapporteurs (on torture, human rights and religious freedoms), the reports are dated 2016, 2018 and 2020. Information on surveillance, intimidation, harassment, land grabs, abductions, unlawful detention and torture, provided in reports from UN High Commissioners for Human Rights in 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024, **is not mentioned** in the DFAT May 2024 report. Therefore, the current DFAT Country information report on Sri Lanka continues to rely on outdated information.

The CRAG Sri Lanka Country Information Report No. 17 aims to provide a truthful account of the current political situation in Sri Lanka and is not influenced by the Sri Lankan government or its instrumentalities.

[3] **NSWCCL calls on DFAT to retract Sri Lanka report.** *NSWCCL* (online, 16th July 2021). https://www.nswccl.org.au/dfat

[4] **NSWCCL calls on DFAT to retract Sri Lanka report**. *NSWCCL* (online, 16th July 2021). https://www.nswccl.org.au/dfat

Introduction

'Fifteen years after the end of the armed conflict, the security situation in the North-East of Sri Lanka is characterised by entrenched militarisation and constant surveillance. Notwithstanding successive regimes in Colombo, politically active individuals and communities in the North-East continue to face risks and reprisals,' states the Adayaalam Centre for Policy Research Report '*A Phantom that is Real -Persisting Culture of Surveillance and Intimidation in the North-East*.' published in February 2025. [5]

In November 2019, the people of Sri Lanka elected Gotabaya Rajapaksa to the office of President. Rajapaksa, referred to within his family as 'The Terminator' was a key player in the 25-year civil war with Tamil separatists and is credited with ending the war through an operation that led to the death of approximately 40,000 people[6]. Gotabaya Rajapaksa served as Defence Secretary in his brother's government from 2005 to 2015 from when he is 'accused of numerous crimes, including attacks on journalists and activists, and implicated in alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity.' [7] Gotabaya Rajapaksa has denied allegations of authorising the disappearances of Tamils, the use of government endorsed death squads, torture, rape, and extrajudicial killings. No accountability has ever been taken for these actions.[8]

In August 2020, Gotabaya Rajapaksa appointed his brother, Mahinda Rajapaksa as Prime Minister. This is the same man who was President at the time of the alleged crimes against the Tamil people of Sri Lanka. Four other seats in Parliament were given to another of his brothers and three nephews.[9]

The Rajapaksa brothers have been accused of war crimes following the deaths of tens of thousands during the final stages of the civil war when Tamil civilians were shelled in a safe zone on a beach where they were awaiting aid from International Committee of the Red Cross ships.[10] Tamil rebels are accused of

---

[5] **A Phantom that is Real -Persisting Culture of Surveillance and Intimidation in the North-East.** Adayaalam Centre for Policy Research. February 2025. https://adayaalam.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/A-Phantom-that-is-Real_-Persisting-Culture-or-Surveilance-and-Intimidation-in-the-NorthEast.pdf

[6] **The Terminator': how Gotabaya Rajapaksa's ruthless streak led him to power.** *The Guardian* (online, 17 November 2019). https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/17/the-terminator-how-gotabaya-rajapaksas-ruthless-streak-led-him-to-power-sri-lanka

[7] **Sri Lanka – Events of 2019. Human Rights Watch.** https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/sri-lanka

[8] **The Terminator': how Gotabaya Rajapaksa's ruthless streak led him to power.** *The Guardian* (online, 17 November 2019). https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/17/the-terminator-how-gotabaya-rajapaksas-ruthless-streak-led-him-to-power-sri-lanka

[9] **Sri Lanka president tightens grip with constitutional changes.** *The Guardian* (online, 23 October 2020) https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/23/sri-lanka-president-gotabaya-rajapaska-parliament-reforms

[10] **Sri Lanka 'war crimes': Main allegations.** *BBC News* (online, 17 June 2011) https://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-13158916

using civilians as human shields and preventing civilians from fleeing the so-called 'safe zone'. Tamil rebels dispute this. The Rajapaksa brothers also deny committing any war crimes.[11] In 2020 President Rajapaksa withdrew Sri Lanka from a UN resolution to investigate war crimes committed during his tenure as Defence Secretary. [12]

While Basil Rajapaksa, the Chief Election Strategist and one of Rajapaksa's brothers, assured Sri Lanka that the government of Gotabaya Rajapaksa would "respect media freedom and civic organisations"[13], this was not the case. A number of legislative changes were put in place granting greater control to the President, increased restrictions on journalists, increased violence against Tamil people, and attacks on human rights organisations. Further to this, actions taken by the previous government to search for the disappeared from the war and make reparations, as well as participate in the UN investigation into war crimes during this time, were reversed.

In early 2022, Sri Lanka plunged into deep economic crisis, sparking massive anti-government protests in the south by the Sinhalese people. In May 2022, as the economic crisis worsened, and following a deadly attack on peaceful anti-government protesters in Colombo, Mahinda Rajapaksa resigned from his position as Prime Minister.[14] Ranil Wickremesinghe was appointed Prime Minister. In July 2022, thousands of people took over government buildings in Colombo, blaming the Rajapaksa family and allies for runaway inflation, shortage of basic goods, and corruption. Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled Sri Lanka and resigned as President.[15]

In a secret ballot in Parliament on 20th July 2022, Ranil Wickremesinghe was appointed President of Sri Lanka. [16] A new Cabinet comprised of those with troubled records was appointed. [17]

---

[11] **Sri Lanka 'war crimes': Main allegations**. BBC News (online, 17 June 2011)

https://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-13158916

[12] **Sri Lanka notifies UN withdrawing from war crimes resolution.** *Wionews* (online, 26 February 2020) https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/sri-lanka-notifies-un-withdrawing-from-war-crimes-resolution-282955

[13] **Gotabaya Rajapaksa elected president of Sri Lanka.** *The Guardian* (online, 17 November 2019) https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/17/sri-lanka-presidential-candidate-rajapaksa-premadas-count-continues

[14] **Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa resigns as violence erupts.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 09 May 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankas-prime-minister-mahinda-rajapaksa-resigns-violence-erupts

[15] **Sri Lanka's crisis is not just about the economy, but a long history of discrimination against minority groups**. *The Conversation* (online, 14 July 2022). https://theconversation.com/sri-lankas-crisis-is-not-just-about-the-economy-but-a-long-history-of-discrimination-against-minority-groups-186747?mc_cid=659d49641a&mc_eid=81f597ba1d

[16] **Ranil Wickremesinghe declared Sri Lanka's president.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 20 July 2022) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/ranil-wickremesinghe-declared-sri-lanka-s-president

[17] **Following a brutal crackdown, Sri Lanka's new ministers are sworn in.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 22 July 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/following-brutal-crackdown-sri-lanka-s-new-ministers-are-sworn

In the Presidential Elections held on 21st September 2024, Anura Kumara Dissanayake was voted in as President. [18]

Sri Lanka has a dark history of violence towards Tamil people and other minority groups. Following an overview of the Rajapaksa family, Ranil Wickremesinghe and Anura Kumara Dissanayake, these issues will each be covered in this report.

Rajapaksa family

The August 2020 Parliamentary Elections saw Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his family strengthen its control over the Sri Lankan administration. The Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) won a two-thirds majority, including the securing of the Parliamentary seat for Mantara District by Gotabaya's nephew, Nipuna Ranawaka. Gotabaya's brother Mahinda was installed as Prime Minister, after having held the position as caretaker since November 2019, and other members of the Rajapaksa family were appointed to positions in the government.

Chamal Rajapaksa, the eldest brother was given the irrigation portfolio while Mahinda's nephew, Shasheendra Rajapaksa was made Agriculture Minister.[19] Mahinda's son, Namal Rajapaksa was initially given the Youth and Sports ministry and later also made the Minister of Digital Technology and Enterprise Development. In August 2021, Namal Rajapaksa was further awarded a new Cabinet portfolio, Development Planning and Monitoring. The appointment of Namal Rajapaksa to this position raised concerns of nepotism and the increasing concentration of state power within the hands of the Rajapaksa family.[20]

During the period in which Gotabaya Rajapaksa was President, political analysts noted a rising centralisation of power, with the appointment of many serving and former military officials to key bureaucratic posts and the creating of presidential task forces to take on governance issues, in some cases bypassing ministries.

Gotabaya's rule was marked, rights groups say, with a widespread crackdown on political and other dissent, with lawyers, activists and journalists harassed, intimidated and arrested when they questioned the government's policies.[21]

---

[18] **Anura Kumara Dissanayake: who is Sri Lanka's new leftist president?** *The Guardian* (online 23rd September 2024). https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/sep/23/anura-kumara-dissanayake-who-is-sri-lanka-new-leftist-president

[19] **Rajapaksas' rule has diminished hope for justice for Lankan Tamils.** *The NEWS Minute* (online, 24 September 2020) https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/rajapaksas-rule-has-diminished-hope-justice-lankan-tamils-133843

[20] **Amidst crisis, Sri Lanka reshuffles cabinet.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 16 August 2021) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/amidst-crisis-sri-lanka-reshuffles-cabinet-0

[21] **Sri Lankan parliamentary elections: Five key takeaways**. *Aljazeera* (online, 7 August 2020) https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/08/sri-lankan-parliamentary-elections-key-takeaways-200807081456427.html

Militarisation gathered pace in Sri Lanka, with Gotabaya Rajapaksa controlling defence, and the Defence Ministry having numerous institutions under its direct purview, including the Department of Archaeology. Home Affairs was attached to the Defence Ministry, bringing under its control district and divisional secretariats (as well as the police). The foreign secretary was a retired military man.[22]

"The absolute majority to the Rajapaksa family means that they can do as they please, without caring about the people. Because of this, the Tamils will have a further erosion of their rights in the country. Their coming to power will take us down a destructive path and pave the way for family rule over the country."

(Sivagnanam Shritharan, member of Parliament from Tamil National Alliance)[23]

Economy was effectively under the control of Basil Rajapaksa, a dual citizen, in an arrangement that Gotabaya Rajapaksa was seeking to formalise through changes to the Constitution. In July 2021, further tightening the Rajapaksa family's control over Sri Lanka, Basil Rajapaksa was sworn into the Sri Lankan cabinet as finance minister. With the inclusion of Basil there were, until April 2022, seven Rajapaksas in power - President Gotabaya, Prime Minister Mahinda, ministers Chamal, Namal, Basil and MPs Sashindra (Chamal's son), Nipuna Ranawaka (nephew). Additionally, Chamal's son Shameendra became Private Secretary to multiple ministries, Mahinda's son Yoshitha became the PM's chief of staff and Chaminda Rajapaksa became a Presidential Adviser.[24]

On 3rd April 2022, Tamil Guardian reported that all of the Sri Lankan Government's 26 cabinet ministers, excepting Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, had tendered their resignations, in the wake of protests, as Sri Lanka plunged into deepening political and economic crises. In response, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa declared a curfew and a state of emergency across the island, giving unfettered powers to security services. [25] [26]

The United Nations Human Rights Office stated

'There have also been reports of excessive and unwarranted police violence against protesters. We are concerned that such measures are aimed at preventing or discouraging people from

---

[22] Tisaranee Gunasekara. **The Rajapaksa Tidal-wave and the Anti-Rajapaksa Tsunami-wall.** *Groundviews Journalism for Citizens* (online, 23 August 2020) https://groundviews.org/2020/08/23/the-rajapaksa-tidal-wave-and-the-anti-rajapaksa-tsunami-wall/

[23] **Rajapaksas' rule has diminished hope for justice for Lankan Tamils.** *The NEWS Minute* (online, 24 September 2020) https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/rajapaksas-rule-has-diminished-hope-justice-lankan-tamils-133843

[24] **Rajapaksas Tighten Stronghold In Sri Lanka As Fourth Brother Basil Joins Cabinet As FM.** *Republicworld.com* (online, 10 July 2021) https://www.republicworld.com/world-news/rest-of-the-world-news/rajapaksas-tighten-stronghold-in-sri-lanka-as-fourth-brother-basil-joins-cabinet-as-fm.html

[25] **Turmoil in Sri Lanka as entire cabinet resigns except Prime Minister Rajapaksa**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, 03 April 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/turmoil-sri-lanka-entire-cabinet-resigns-except-prime-minister-rajapaksa

[26] **Sri Lanka's largest opposition party has rejected the president's invitation to form a unity government, as protests continue over the country's worst economic crisis in memory and deepening mistrust in his leadership.** *Associated Press* (online, 5th April 2022). https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/sri-lanka-president-proposes-multiparty-cabinet-amid-crisis-83858719

legitimately expressing their grievances through peaceful protests, and that they frustrate the exchange of views on matters of public interest. We remind the Sri Lankan authorities that measures related to states of emergency must comply with international human rights law, should be limited to the extent strictly required by the situation and be proportionate to it, and should not be used to stifle dissent or hinder peaceful protest.' …. 'The High Commissioner has also previously voiced her concern that the Government responds to criticism and dissent in ways that undermine civic space, and we reiterate these concerns.' [27]

On 9th May 2022, Mahinda Rajapaksa resigned from his position as Prime Minister, after Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) supporters violently assaulted peaceful anti-government demonstrators. [28] Seven people died during the incidents - including a Member of Parliament and two local officials, over 250 were injured, and the properties of others were destroyed by arson throughout the country. [29]

"I am deeply troubled by the escalation of violence in Sri Lanka after supporters of the Prime Minister attacked peaceful protestors in Colombo yesterday 9 May and the subsequent mob violence against members of the ruling party," the UN Human Rights Commissioner Michelle Bachelet said. [30]

A Sri Lankan court on 12th May 2022, imposed an overseas travel ban on former prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, his son and MP Namal Rajapaksa and 15 others in view of investigations against them for the deadly attack on peaceful anti-government protesters in Colombo. [31]

In May 2022, Ranil Wickremesinghe was appointed to the position of Prime Minister by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. [32]

In July 2022, amid massive anti-government protests, Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled Sri Lanka and resigned his presidency. [33]

---

[27] **Press Briefing Notes OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS Sri Lanka: Concern at measures in response to protests amid economic crisis.** 05 April 2022. https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-briefing-notes/2022/04/sri-lanka-concern-measures-response-protests-amid-economic-crisis

[28] **Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa resigns as violence erupts.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 09 May 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankas-prime-minister-mahinda-rajapaksa-resigns-violence-erupts

[29] **Bachelet urges restraint, and pathway to dialogue as violence escalates in Sri Lanka.** OHCHR Press Release. 10th May 2022. https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/05/bachelet-urges-restraint-and-pathway-dialogue-violence-escalates-sri-lanka

[30] **Bachelet urges restraint, and pathway to dialogue as violence escalates in Sri Lanka.** OHCHR Press Release. 10th May 2022. https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/05/bachelet-urges-restraint-and-pathway-dialogue-violence-escalates-sri-lanka

[31] **Sri Lankan court imposes overseas travel ban on former PM Mahinda Rajapaksa, 16 others.** *Eastern Mirror* (online, 12th May 2022). https://easternmirrornagaland.com/sri-lankan-court-imposes-overseas-travel-ban-on-former-pm-mahinda-rajapaksa-16-others/

[32] **Rajapaksa swears in 4 Cabinet members amid Sri Lanka crisis.** *Montana Standard* (online, 14th May 2022) https://mtstandard.com/news/national/govt-and-politics/rajapaksa-swears-in-4-cabinet-members-amid-sri-lanka-crisis/article_ca89b2f8-c6d0-5c7d-bcf8-60ecb3c10d90.html

[33] **Sri Lanka's crisis is not just about the economy, but a long history of discrimination against minority groups**. *The Conversation* (online, 14 July 2022). https://theconversation.com/sri-lankas-crisis-is-not-just-about-the-economy-but-a-long-history-of-discrimination-against-minority-groups-186747?mc_cid=659d49641a&mc_eid=81f597ba1d

With the support of the Rajapaksas' political party, the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), Ranil Wickremesinghe was declared President of Sri Lanka on 20th July 2022 in a secret parliamentary ballot. [34] SLPP politician Dinesh Gunawardena was elevated to the position of Prime Minister. [35]

The scale of protests by Sinhalese against the Rajapaksa-led Government has been unprecedented. But Sri Lanka's Tamils, the country's most persecuted community, were visibly absent from the protests. Mario Arulthas, advisor to U.S.-based Tamil rights non-profit People For Equality and Relief in Lanka, said:

"*Of all the bad things the Rajapaksas have done, the worst of it all is what they did to the Tamils. If you look at the risks Tamil people take and despite that, the actions they take, particularly using words like 'genocide' and accusing members of the ruling family, this can't be compared to what's happening in Colombo*." [36]

Freedom House in its 'Freedom in the World Report 2023', noted that the Rajapaksa family appears to maintain significant control through the SLPP. [37]

In February 2023, the Colombo Gazette reported that the SLPP was making moves to replace current Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena, a member of the SLPP, and appoint Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) leader Mahinda Rajapaksa as Prime Minister. [38]

Ranil Wickremesinghe

After the resignation of Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Ranil Wickremesinghe was declared President of Sri Lanka on 20th July 2022, with the support of the Rajapaksas' political party, the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna, in a secret parliamentary ballot.[39] [40] Ranil Wickremesinghe is the leader of the United National Party (UNP). The UNP was completely wiped out in the 2020 General Elections but secured a parliamentary seat for Wickremesinghe through the National List.

Wickremesinghe has consistently stated his opposition to any international accountability mechanism for violations of international humanitarian law. He

---

[34] **Ranil Wickremesinghe declared Sri Lanka's president.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 20 July 2022) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/ranil-wickremesinghe-declared-sri-lanka-s-president

[35] **Following a brutal crackdown, Sri Lanka's new ministers are sworn in.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 22 July 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/following-brutal-crackdown-sri-lanka-s-new-ministers-are-sworn

[36] **Why These Women Aren't Joining Sri Lanka's Massive Anti-Government Protests.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 25th May 2022). https://www.vice.com/en/article/n7n8jx/tamils-sri-lanka-protest-rajapaksa-crisis

[37] **2023, Freedom House (Author) Sri Lanka. Annual report on political rights and civil liberties in 2022**. https://freedomhouse.org/country/sri-lanka/freedom-world/2023

[38] **Moves to make Mahinda PM again.** *Colombo Gazette* (online, February 25, 2023). https://colombogazette.com/2023/02/25/moves-to-make-mahinda-pm-again/

[39] **Ranil Wickremesinghe declared Sri Lanka's president.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 20 July 2022) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/ranil-wickremesinghe-declared-sri-lanka-s-president

[40] **Sri Lanka: Security Forces Assault Peaceful Protesters.** *Human Rights Watch* (online, 22 July 2022). https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/07/22/sri-lanka-security-forces-assault-peaceful-protesters

has also claimed to have saved members of the government, including Mahinda Rajapaksa, from being brought before the International Criminal Court. [41]

Wickremesinghe has close ties to those accused of mass atrocities, including Shavendra Silva, the current head of the Sri Lankan army who is barred from entry to the USA due to his role in the execution of Tamils.

"I have no problem with Shavendra Silva. He is my friend, and he has helped me a lot," said Wickremesinghe. [42]

The Cabinet included Dinesh Gunawardena who was elevated to the position of Prime Minister, Ali Sabry, Douglas Devananda, Vidura Wickramanayake and Wijeyadasa Rajapakshe. Sabry is a long-time Rajapaksa ally and was a member of the legal team of Gotabaya's presidential counsel. Devananda heads the notorious Eelam People's Democratic Party, a paramilitary organisation that continues to remain close to the Rajapaksa family. Wickramanayake supported militarisation efforts in his previous post as state minister for 'national heritage'. Wijeyadasa Rajapakshe previously advocated for the rape of lesbians to "cure" them of homosexuality and lashed out at UN Special Rapporteur Ben Emmerson, accusing him of "false facts". [43]

MP Tiran Alles replaced Sarath Weerasekara as Minister of Public Security in the Wickremesinghe Government. Tiran Alles has in the past been under investigation for alleged misappropriation of funds. [44] [45]

In September 2022, Human Rights Watch reported that three State Ministers appointed to the Wickremesinghe government were implicated in serious human rights abuses - a further alarming indication that the Wickremesinghe administration was not committed to protecting human rights, ending impunity, or upholding the rule of law. They are Sivanesathurai Chandrakanthan, better known as Pillayan, Lohan Ratwatte and Sanath Nishantha. [46]

Ranil Wickremesinghe did not shy away from using military force. He extended the state of emergency he declared as acting president.[47] Wickremesinghe

---

[41] **Ranil Wickremesinghe declared Sri Lanka's president.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 20 July 2022) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/ranil-wickremesinghe-declared-sri-lanka-s-president

[42] Ibid.

[43] **Following a brutal crackdown, Sri Lanka's new ministers are sworn in.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 22 July 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/following-brutal-crackdown-sri-lanka-s-new-ministers-are-sworn

[44] **EXCLUSIVE: Tiran Alles must show transparency dealing with the Party's money.** *Sri Lanka Guardian* (online, 23 November 2010). http://www.srilankaguardian.org/2010/11/exclusive-tiran-alles-must-show.html

[45] **Misappropriation of Rs 124 m RADA public funds. Tiran Alles, three others discharged.** Sunday Observer (online, 12 July 2020). https://www.sundayobserver.lk/2020/07/12/news/tiran-alles-three-others-discharged

[46] **Sri Lankan Government Appoints Alleged Rights Abusers.** *Human Rights Watch* (online, 08 September 2022). https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/09/08/sri-lankan-government-appoints-alleged-rights-abusers

[47] **In Sri Lanka, the Military Still Runs the Show.** *Foreign Policy* (online, 4 August 2022). https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/08/04/sri-lanka-military-power-protests-history/?tpcc=onboarding_trending

previously called protesters "fascists" and directed the armed forces to "do whatever is necessary to restore order." He also refused to hold the Sri Lankan military accountable for past human rights violations and mass atrocities. [48]

"Just one day after taking office, President Wickremesinghe oversaw a brutal assault by security forces on peaceful protesters in the heart of Colombo,"

said Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia director at Human Rights Watch.

"*This action sends a dangerous message to the Sri Lankan people that the new government intends to act through brute force rather than the rule of law."* [49]

Human Rights Watch reported that since Ranil Wickremesinghe was sworn in as president, the police and military had sought to curtail protests through the intimidation, surveillance, and arbitrary arrests of demonstrators, civil society activists, lawyers, and journalists. *'The Sri Lankan government is using emergency regulations to harass and arbitrarily detain activists seeking political reform and accountability for the country's economic crisis'*, said the report. Security forces injured more than 50 people in the July 22 early morning raid on the main janatha aragalaya (people's struggle) site in Colombo. Security forces assaulted and beat three journalists. Wickremesinghe berated foreign diplomats for criticizing the security forces' use of excessive force and took no action to hold those responsible to account. [50]

UN Human Rights Office spokesperson Jeremy Laurence issued a statement: *"We are alarmed by the unnecessary use of force reportedly employed by Sri Lanka's security forces to break up a protest camp near presidential offices in Colombo – only hours before the protesters indicated that it was due to be dismantled. We condemn the reports of beatings of protesters, journalists and lawyers. …… The use of force against peaceful protesters runs contrary to international law, and we urge authorities to immediately halt the use of such force. …. We have concerns that the raid on the camp sends a chilling message to peaceful protesters, including elsewhere in the country."* [51]

On August 8, 2022, fourteen UN Human Rights Experts condemned the extensive, prolonged and repeated use of state of emergency measures since 2 April 2022 by Sri Lankan authorities to crack down on peaceful protesters and prevent them from voicing their grievances amidst economic collapse in the country. President Ranil Wickremesinghe declared another state of emergency on 17 July 2022, vowing to take a tough line against "troublemakers". The Sri Lankan

---

[48] **Sri Lanka's international partners should send the message that they can't support an administration that violates human rights.** *Human Rights Watch* (online, 25 July 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-s-international-partners-should-send-message-they-can-t-support-administration

[49] **Sri Lanka: Security Forces Assault Peaceful Protesters.** *Human Rights Watch* (online, 22 July 2022). https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/07/22/sri-lanka-security-forces-assault-peaceful-protesters

[50] **Sri Lanka: Heightened Crackdown on Dissent. End Arbitrary Arrests, Harassment of Protesters, Activists, Journalists.** *Human Rights Watch* (online, 2 August 2022). https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/08/02/sri-lanka-heightened-crackdown-dissent

[51] **Comment by UN Human Rights Office spokesperson Jeremy Laurence on raid on Sri Lanka protest camp.** *OHCHR* (online, 22 July 2022). https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/07/comment-un-human-rights-office-spokesperson-jeremy-laurence-raid-sri-lanka

Parliament further ratified an ordinance on 27 July 2022 extending the current state of emergency for another month, imposing a curfew, and granting broad and discretionary powers to security forces and the military. Such powers allowed them to detain protesters and search private properties without judicial supervision.

"We have raised our concerns to the Government on a number of occasions over the misuse of emergency measures, but to no avail. We condemn the recent and continued abuse of such measures to infringe on the legitimate exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression," the Human Rights experts said. [52]

Tamanna Salikuddin, director of South Asia programs at the U.S. Institute of Peace, said in August 2022:

"The cabinet and parliament are still dominated by the Rajapaksa allies that really came to power on a right-wing, Sinhalese Buddhist populist platform. The parliament hasn't changed, and the parliament picked a president." [53]

Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 detailed the continued repression of human rights defenders and other civil society activists, in Sri Lanka under President Wickremesinghe.[54]

In March 2023, Minister of Public Security, Tiran Alles refrained from appearing at a summons before Sri Lanka's Human Rights Commission to address the conduct of police in administering a violent crackdown against student protestors.[55] Speaking in Parliament, State Minister of Tourism, Diana Gamage, advocated for violence against student demonstrators to end their protests. Government-aligned MP Nimal Lansa decried the student protesters as "good for nothing" and compared their actions to terrorism. [56]

South Asia director at Human Rights Watch, Meenakshi Ganguly noted that, *"President Ranil Wickremesinghe responded to calls for reform and accountability with repression."* [57]

---

[52] **Sri Lanka: UN human rights experts condemn repeated use of emergency measures to crackdown on protests.** *OHCHR* (online, 8 August 2022). https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/08/sri-lanka-un-human-rights-experts-condemn-repeated-use-emergency-measures

[53] **Tamanna Salikuddin on the Crisis in Sri Lanka.** *US Institute of Peace*. (online, 3 August, 2022). https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/08/tamanna-salikuddin-crisis-sri-lanka

[54] **World Report 2023 - Sri Lanka. Human Rights Watch.** Published 12th January 2023. https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/sri-lanka

[55] **Tiran Alles to refrain from appearing before HRCSL for inquiry.** *Adaderana.lk* (online, 12 March 2023). https://www.adaderana.lk/news/89016/tiran-alles-to-refrain-from-appearing-before-hrcsl-for-inquiry-

[56] **'These people must be beaten' – Sri Lanka's Tourism Minister demands violence against student protesters.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 13 March 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/these-people-must-be-beaten-sri-lanka-s-tourism-minister-demands-violence-against-student

[57] **'Change of Presidents of Sri Lanka in 2022 did not lead to any improvement in the country's human rights records' – HRW.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 16 January 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/change-presidents-sri-lanka-2022-did-not-lead-any-improvement-countrys-human-rights-records

In June 2023, Sri Lankan authorities fired tear gas and water cannons on hundreds of students protesting in the capital to demand the release of people arrested during the anti-government protests in 2022. The protesters said the imprisonment of dozens of students and activists amounted to political persecution and that the Wickremesinghe government was continuing its campaign to repress and silence people's voices. [58]

In July 2023, the global civil society alliance CIVICUS rated the state of civil space in Sri Lanka as 'obstructed', citing ongoing concerns about 'the harassment, intimidation, surveillance, disappearances and killings, with impunity, of journalists, human rights activists and other media workers, the misuse of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Act No. 56 of 2007 to stifle freedom of expression, the blocking of public access to social media platforms ahead of and during anti-government protests in 2022, the use of excessive force in dispersing peaceful assemblies, the application of counter-terrorism legislation against protestors and the lack of effective investigations and prosecutions in these cases.' [59] In December 2023, CIVICUS rated the state of civil space in Sri Lanka to 'repressed', with authorities clamping down on protesters, stifling journalists and targeting activists. [60]

In September 2023, the Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Situation of Human Rights in Sri Lanka stated:

'OHCHR continues to receive reports of surveillance, intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders, activists and persons involved in memorialization initiatives by intelligence services, the military and the police or by unidentified individuals affiliated with former paramilitaries. Lack of accountability at all levels remains the fundamental main human rights problem. Whether it refers to war crime atrocities, post-war emblematic cases, torture and deaths in police custody, excesses in crowd control, corruption and the abuse of power, Sri Lanka suffers from an extraordinary accountability deficit that unless addressed will drag the country further behind.' [61]

In February 2024 President Ranil Wickremesinghe appointed Deshabandu Tennakoon as the incumbent Inspector General of Police in Sri Lanka, despite his appointment not having been approved by the state's Constitutional Council. The

---

[58] **Tear gas, water cannon fired on protesting Sri Lankan students.** Al *Jazeera* (online, 07 June 2023). https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/7/tear-gas-water-cannon-fired-on-protesting-sri-lankan-students

[59] **Sri Lanka: despite UN calls to protect civic freedoms, government targets activists and critics and stifles dissent. CIVICUS Monitor.** 7th July 2023. https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/sri-lanka-despite-un-calls-to-protect-civic-freedoms-government-targets-activists-and-critics-and-stifles-dissent/

[60] **Sri Lanka: authorities continue to stifle protests, harass activists and push repressive laws.** *CIVICUS* (online, 7th March 2024). https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/sri-lanka-authorities-continue-to-stifle-protests-harass-activists-and-push-repressive-laws/

[61] **Situation of human rights in Sri Lanka. Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Human Rights Council. Fifty-fourth session 11 September–6 October 2023.** paragraphs 33 & 61]. https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/09/accountability-central-sri-lankas-future-un-human-rights-report

Supreme Court found in a historic judgement in December 2023 that Tennakoon had personally participated in torture. [62]

In February 2024, President Wickremesinghe appointed Shasheendra Rajapaksa, son of Chamal Rajapaksa, Sri Lanka's former speaker and minister, to the Cabinet position of State Minister for Irrigation and Water Resources Management. [63]

In March 2024, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk, delivered to the 55th Session of the UN Human Rights Council an Oral Update on progress in reconciliation and accountability in Sri Lanka.

"I am concerned by the introduction of new or proposed laws with potentially far-reaching impact on fundamental rights and freedoms, the rule of law and democratic governance.

These include the Online Safety Act; the Anti-Terrorism Bill; the Electronic Media Broadcasting Authority Bill; and the NGO Supervision and Registration Bill – which variously strengthen the executive, grant broad powers to the security forces, and severely restrict rights to freedom of assembly, association and expression, impacting not only on civic space but the business environment.

Violations of human rights remain unaddressed. Tens of thousands of families of the disappeared are still looking for their loved ones and face intimidation, arrests and violence in their search. Land disputes continue to escalate in the north and east of the country impacting on people's livelihoods. Provincial Councils and local government bodies, that promised a measure of devolution, are not currently constituted.

My Office continues to receive allegations of surveillance, harassment and arrests by security forces of civil society representatives, journalists and victims, as well as of people who have been involved in organising commemoration events for war victims.

I remain deeply concerned about recurring, credible accounts received by my Office of abductions, unlawful detention and torture, including sexual violence, by the Sri Lankan police and security forces, some of which allegedly took place in 2023, mainly in the north and east of the country. Last week, the appointment of a new Inspector General of Police was confirmed, despite the Supreme Court's finding that he was responsible for torture of an individual in 2010. These cases highlight the need for comprehensive security sector reform.

Sustainable peace and reconciliation will not be achieved in Sri Lanka with regressive laws and authoritarian approaches, which will only serve to perpetuate the human rights concerns of the past." [64]

In April 2024, Amnesty International's Report 'The State of the World's Human Rights', reported that in Sri Lanka:

---

[62] **Torturer formally appointed Sri Lanka's police chief, despite Constitutional Council decision.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 27 February 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/torturer-formally-appointed-sri-lanka-s-police-chief-despite-constitutional-council-decision

[63] **Ranil brings back a Rajapaksa - Shasheendra given portfolio.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 01 February 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/ranil-brings-back-rajapaksa-shasheendra-given-portfolio

[64] **High Commissioner presents updates on human rights in Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Cyprus and Sri Lanka. OHCHR** (Online, 01 March 2024). https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/03/high-commissioner-presents-updates-human-rights-colombia-guatemala

"The government continued to use draconian counterterror laws and attempted to bring in new laws to counter dissent and threaten freedom of expression, resulting in arbitrary arrests and detentions. The right to freedom of peaceful assembly was restricted amid continued use of excessive and unnecessary force against protesters. Impunity remained entrenched with the government making no notable progress around the right to truth, justice and reparation for those affected by war." [65]

In April 2024, the US State Department released its Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Sri Lanka, reporting that:

"Significant human rights issues included credible reports of arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence and threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests of journalists, and censorship; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental organizations and civil society organizations; inability of citizens to change their government peacefully through free and fair elections; serious government corruption. The government took minimal steps to identify and punish officials who may have committed human rights abuses." [66]

Anura Kumara Dissanayake

Anura Kumara Dissanayake was voted in as President on 21st September 2024. Dissanayake is the leader of the Marxist party Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). He won the presidential election as part of the National People's Power (NPP), a broader leftist coalition that campaigned to the Sri Lankan electorate through its anti-corruption and pro-poor messaging. Although Dissanayake polled well in the south of Sri Lanka, he received a poor showing in the Tamil homeland of the North-East. [67] [68]

Historically the JVP has been a staunchly Sinhala Buddhist party, seen to work against the rights of Tamils who live in the north and east of the island where they face economic and military repression. The JVP was supportive of the brutal actions taken against Tamil separatists during the 26-year civil war and has

[65] **The State of the World's Human Rights. Amnesty International. April 2024.** https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/7200/2024/en/#:~:text=States%20and%20armed%20groups%20are,have%20disproportionately%20affected%20marginalized%20communities.

[66] **2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Sri Lanka. April 2024. US State Department. Executive Summary.** https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/sri-lanka/?s=08

[67] **Anura Kumara Dissanayake: who is Sri Lanka's new leftist president?** *The Guardian* (online 23rd September 2024). https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/sep/23/anura-kumara-dissanayake-who-is-sri-lanka-new-leftist-president

[68] **Sri Lankan president dissolves parliament and sets date for snap general election** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 25 September 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-president-dissolves-parliament-and-sets-date-snap-general-election

resisted calls for investigations into the human rights abuses that took place in the conflict. [69]

Dissanayake has openly voiced his opposition to the devolution of powers to Tamils, has vowed to protect war criminals, and has stated that he "will not seek to punish anyone accused of rights violations and war crimes". [70] In one of his first acts as president of Sri Lanka, Dissanayake appointed accused war criminal Sampath Thuyacontha as the new Secretary of Defence, taking over the position from another accused war criminal Kamal Gunaratne. [71] Ravi Seneviratne, a former senior security chief who headed the notorious Criminal Investigation Department (CID), was appointed as the Secretary of the Public Security Ministry. [72] Sri Lanka's newest Foreign Minister is Vijitha Herath a senior Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) leader. [73]

Dissanayake appointed Dr Harini Amarasuriya, a parliamentarian with his National People's Power (NPP) coalition, as the new prime minister. Amarasuriya is a prominent rights activist in Sri Lanka. [74] Following the 2024 Presidential election results, new Governors were sworn in.[75]

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake issued an Extraordinary Gazette notification calling on the three divisions of Sri Lanka's armed forces to maintain public order throughout all districts effective from 27th September 2024. The gazette notification followed the dissolution of Sri Lanka's parliament and the announcement of a general election on 14th November 2024. [76]

In the General Election, Sri Lanka's National People's Power (NPP) swept parliament with a majority. The NPP now holds 159 seats in the 225-member parliament. Several veteran Tamil parliamentarians lost their seats, including

---

[69] **Anura Kumara Dissanayake: who is Sri Lanka's new leftist president?** *The Guardian* (online 23rd September 2024). https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/sep/23/anura-kumara-dissanayake-who-is-sri-lanka-new-leftist-president

[70] **Anura Kumara Dissanayake declared Sri Lankan president**. Tamil Guardian (online, 22 September 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/anura-kumara-dissanayake-declared-sri-lankan-president

[71] **Another accused Sri Lankan war criminal appointed as Defence Secretary**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, 23 September 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/another-accused-sri-lankan-war-criminal-appointed-defence-secretary

[72] **D.W.R.B. Seneviratne appointed as the Secretary to the Ministry of Public Security.** *Presidents Media Division* Published on: September 23, 2024. https://pmd.gov.lk/news/mps/

[73] **New Sri Lankan foreign minister's first remarks thank Saudi Arabia for combatting UN resolutions on war crimes.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 26 September 2024.) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/new-sri-lankan-foreign-ministers-first-remarks-thank-saudi-arabia-combatting-un-resolutions

[74] **Sri Lanka's new Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya on Tamils, justice and racism.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 24 September 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-s-new-prime-minister-harini-amarasuriya-tamils-justice-and-racism

[75] **President appoints new Provincial Governors.** *Newswire* (online, September 25, 2024). https://www.newswire.lk/2024/09/25/prent-appoints-new-provisional-governors/

[76] **Sri Lankan President issues extraordinary gazette for armed forces to maintain public order.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 27 September 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-president-issues-extraordinary-gazette-armed-forces-maintain-public-order

paramilitary leader Douglas Devananda who heads the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), a paramilitary organisation closely allied to the Sri Lankan state; and Pillayan (Sivanesathurai Chandrakanthan), paramilitary leader of the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP), a party with a history of significant human rights violations and abuses. [77]

The organisation People for Equality and Relief in Lanka (PEARL) noted in their November 2024 statement that:

"While the recent elections have sparked some hope for change, the Sri Lankan government persists in perpetuating the policies of its predecessors, disregarding Tamil demands for justice, accountability, and self-determination. By appointing and retaining alleged war criminals as senior government officials and rejecting calls for credible international mechanisms for justice in favor of ineffective domestic alternatives, the government signals a lack of genuine commitment to accountability and Tamil demands. These actions underscore its reluctance to address longstanding Tamil grievances. Far from resetting relations with the Tamil people, these policies continue to erode trust and set a concerning trajectory for stability and peace on the island." [78]

In October 2024, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) adopted a resolution that extended the mandate of the Office of the High Commissioner for a further year so that it could continue collecting evidence of Sri Lanka's human rights violations that may be used in future war crimes trials. The new Sri Lankan government opposed the resolution.[79]

In January 2025, the CIVICUS Monitor rated the state of civic space in Sri Lanka as 'repressed'. Ongoing concerns include restrictions and disruption of peaceful protests, at times with excessive use of force, and the stifling of journalists. Activists have also been targeted and criminalised using defamation and counter-terror laws, and there has been a systematic failure to address past crimes against them.[80]

"Sri Lanka's multiple crises are connected by entrenched impunity for rights violations, discrimination against minority communities, and laws and institutions that seek to silence critics," said Meenakshi Ganguly, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch, in January 2025. *"President Dissanayake has an opportunity to make real progress on rights if he carries out his campaign pledges, but he also*

---

[77] **Veteran Tamil politicians and paramilitary figures lose their seats.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 15 November 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/veteran-tamil-politicians-and-paramilitary-figures-lose-their-seats

[78] **Eelam Tamils honor their fallen while coming together as a nation.** People for Equality and Relief in Lanka (PEARL), 27 November 2024. https://pearlaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Maaveerar-Naal-Statement-2024.pdf

[79] **UN resolution on Sri Lankan war crimes collection passes without vote despite government opposition**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, 09 October 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/un-resolution-sri-lankan-war-crimes-collection-passes-without-vote-despite-government

[80] **Sri Lanka: Civic space restrictions and targeting of activists persist as new government takes power**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, 13 January 2025). https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/sri-lanka-civic-space-restrictions-and-targeting-of-activists-persist-as-new-government-takes-power/

needs to address the legacy of past conflicts and continuing abuses against Tamils, Muslims, and others on which he has been troublingly silent." [81]

Adayaalam Centre for Policy Research in their latest February 2025 report stated that under the Dissanayake Government, suppression of memorialisation in the North-East had continued; there is a continuation of a repressive political culture regarding security, particularly the patterns of surveillance, intimidation, and arrests in the North-East; and the continued use of the Prevention of Terrorism Act despite winning the parliamentary elections implies that it is unlikely to be repealed anytime soon. [82]

Sri Lanka's local government elections held in May 2025, illustrated a sharp decline in support for the National People's Power (NPP) -the current Sri Lankan Government, a fall most pronounced in the Tamil North-East, where demilitarisation, an end to state-sponsored colonisation, and meaningful accountability for genocide, have been conspicuously sidelined. [83]

In June 2025 at the 59th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Sri Lanka Core Group expressed continued concern over Sri Lanka's lack of progress on human rights and accountability commitments. The Core Group called on the Sri Lankan government to "address longstanding impunity and ensure that journalists, human rights defenders and civil society organisations can operate freely and safely." [84]

In September 2025, the CIVICUS Monitor, a civil society platform tracking civic space around the world, documented over the past year of the Dissanayake Government various violations of civic freedoms in Sri Lanka, including the targeting of human rights defenders, activists and journalists, efforts to control civil society, protests restrictions and the failure to support efforts to ensure accountability for violations during Sri Lanka's 1983-2009 civil war. The CIVICUS Monitor continues to rate the state of civic space in Sri Lanka as 'repressed'. Human rights defenders and activists continue to face intimidation and harassment, while journalists critical of the government, particularly those based in the north and on the east coast, are subjected to ongoing surveillance,

---

[81] **HRW urges Sri Lanka President to address legacy of past conflicts and continuing rights abuses.** *Adaderana (*online, 18 January 2025) https://www.adaderana.lk/news.php?nid=105065

[82] **A Phantom that is Real -Persisting Culture of Surveillance and Intimidation in the North-East.** Adayaalam Centre for Policy Research. February 2025. https://adayaalam.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/A-Phantom-that-is-Real_-Persisting-Culture-or-Surveilance-and-Intimidation-in-the-NorthEast.pdf

[83] **Tamil resistance at the polls.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, May 9, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamil-resistance-polls

[84] **UN Human Rights Council 59: Sri Lanka Core Group statement for the Interactive Dialogue on the High Commissioner's Annual Report**. **17 June, 2025**. https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/un-human-rights-council-59-sri-lanka-core-group-statement-for-the-interactive-dialogue-on-the-high-commissioners-annual-report

harassment, and intimidation by the police and military. There have also been restrictions and arrests of protesters. [85]

'CIVICUS is also alarmed by the failure to repeal or review restrictive laws to bring them in line with international law and standards. The notorious Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) has been used to target perceived opponents and minority communities without credible evidence, despite repeated pledges to end the practice. The Online Safety Act, that is inconsistent with international human rights standards and has sparked fears among rights groups, remains in force. This runs contrary to the promises made by the National People's Power (NPP), during the presidential elections to abolish the act altogether. The Dissanayake government has also failed to launch any credible accountability process into the crimes committed during the civil war, despite overwhelming evidence gathered by the UN and human rights groups. Meanwhile, Tamil activists and victim communities continue to face repression and other violations for demanding justice and accountability.' [86]

In October 2025, the Sri Lankan Government once again rejected a United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) resolution on accountability and reconciliation, condemning the continued operation of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' (OHCHR) Sri Lanka Accountability Project. [87]

Legislative changes for greater control

In 2015 the Sri Lankan constitution was amended to reduce the powers of the Executive President. This 19th Amendment made the President more accountable to Parliament and the courts and gave more independence to a number of commissions.

However, in October 2020 the government elect pushed through a 20th Amendment to the constitution, giving the President full powers to appoint members to what were previously independent commissions, including commissions that 'oversee elections, police, human rights and anti-corruption efforts.'[88]

---

[85] **Sri Lanka: Continued civic space violations and lack of reforms, one year on.** *CIVICUS* (online, 19 September 2025). https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/news/7886-sri-lanka-continued-civic-space-violations-and-lack-of-reforms-one-year-on

[86] **Sri Lanka: Continued civic space violations and lack of reforms, one year on.** *CIVICUS* (online, 19 September 2025). https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/news/7886-sri-lanka-continued-civic-space-violations-and-lack-of-reforms-one-year-on

[87] **Sri Lanka lashes out at UN over renewed resolution on accountability.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, October 07, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-lashes-out-un-over-renewed-resolution-accountability

[88] **Sri Lanka president tightens grip with constitutional changes.** *The Guardian* (online, 23 October 2020) https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/23/sri-lanka-president-gotabaya-rajapaska-parliament-reforms

The International Commission of Jurists criticised the 20th Amendment, saying that it introduced judicial appointment procedures which were incompatible with principles of the justice and "gives the President sole and unfettered discretion to appoint all judges of the superior courts. Under international standards, appointments to the judiciary should not be vested solely with the executive."[89]

According to Inform, a Sri Lankan human rights group, on 25 September 2020 President Rajapaksa ordered 'state officials to treat all his verbal orders as circulars to be implemented' and that 'those who neglect this will face stern action.'[90] This verbal order can be 'unrecorded, and sometimes could contravene with the existing laws, policies and other measures.'[91]

In March 2021, the Sri Lankan Government passed regulations allowing detention without trial for two years for those suspected to have caused "religious, racial or communal disharmony". This was a significant expansion of the already notorious Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), which has historically been used to target Tamils and Muslims. The expansion provided security forces with sweeping powers under the pretext of deradicalization.[92] [See also the chapter on the PTA on pages 98 -104 of this report.]

On 30th August 2021, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa declared a state of emergency. The emergency law enabled authorities to detain people without warrants, seize property, enter and search any premises, suspend laws and issue orders that cannot be questioned in court. Officials who issue such orders were also immune from lawsuits.[93]

In October 2021, Gotabaya Rajapksa established a Presidential Task Force 'One Country, One Law' headed by the notorious extremist monk, and ex-convict, Galagodaaththe Gnanasara. The Presidential Task Force faced severe criticism from numerous human rights organisations including Sri Lanka's Bar Association (BASL) and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ). The ICJ warned that the task force may be used to target minorities and highlighted the Gnanasara record of imprisonment for contempt of court and being "openly violent and racist". [94]

---

[89] **Sri Lanka: newly adopted 20th Amendment to the Constitution is blow to the rule of law.** *International Commission of Jurists* (online, 27 October 2020). https://www.icj.org/sri-lanka-newly-adopted-20th-amendment-to-the-constitution-is-blow-to-the-rule-of-law/

[90] **Repression of Dissent, September 2020.** *Inform* https://www.inform.lk/repression-of-dissent-september-2020/

[91] Ibid

[92] Mario Arulthas. **Sri Lanka: Discrimination against Muslims and Tamils is getting worse.** *Middle East Eye* (online, 30 March 2021). https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/how-sri-lankas-future-could-replicate-its-past

[93] **Sri Lanka Authorities Crack Down on Protests, Stifle Critics and Accused of Torturing Detainees.** *CIVICUS* (online, 5 October 2021. https://monitor.civicus.org/about/aboutcivicus/

[94] **Sri Lankan President rejects resignation of Justice Minister.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 9 November 2021). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-president-rejects-resignation-justice-minister

In January 2022, Sri Lanka's Ministry of Defence declared that all marriages between Sri Lankan citizens and foreigners would now require military approval, sparking fears across the more than million-strong Tamil diaspora over its ties to the homeland. The new law requires all foreign nationals who are seeking to marry Sri Lankan citizens to obtain a 'Security Clearance Report'. [95]

Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 reported that the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) was reviewing the status of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka after its independence was removed by the constitutional 20th amendment. [96] The proposed recommendation by the accreditation sub-committee of GANHRI was that the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) be downgraded to B status. Concerns related to the lack of pluralism in the HRCSL's membership of Commissioners and staff, as well as its effectiveness in discharging its human rights mandate. The HRCSL had not effectively engaged on and publicly addressed all human rights issues including allegations of deaths in custody and torture, nor had it spoken out in a manner that promotes and protects all human rights. [97]

In March 2022 it was reported by Tamil Guardian that the Ministry of Public Security, in collaboration with the State Ministry of Community Police Service and the Sri Lanka Police, planned to recruit at least two youths as full-time "community assistants" to each 'Grama Nildhari' division under the Community Police Service Programme. The youths would directly report to and assist police officers in obtaining individual and community participation in various activities within their respective 'Grama Niladhari'. Opposing parties criticized this move, stating that to secretly gather confidential information on society and civilians is unconstitutional and a violation of their Fundamental Rights. [98]

In May 2022, Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, announced a proposed 21st Amendment to strengthen parliament. The leader of Sri Lanka's opposition, Sajith Premadasa, denounced the move, stating that the amendment did not abolish the executive Presidency and that the President could continue to hold an unlimited number of ministerial posts. [99]

In May 2022, Tamil National Alliance MP, MA Sumanthiran, demanded the dissolution of parliament and fresh elections.

---

[95] **Fear across Tamil diaspora after Sri Lankan military demands approval before marriage**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, 13 January 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/fear-across-tamil-diaspora-after-sri-lankan-military-demands-approval-marriage

[96] **World Report 2022 -Sri Lanka. Human Rights Watch.** https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/sri-lanka

[97] **Report and Recommendations of the Virtual Session of the Sub-Committee on Accreditation. GANHRI. October 2021.** [pages 31-34] https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/NHRI/GANHRI/SCA-Report-October-2021_E.pdf

[98] **Sri Lanka recruits 'youths' to monitor and report political activities to the police. Tamil Guardian (online, 01 March 2022).** https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-recruits-youths-monitor-and-report-political-activities-police

[99] **Sri Lanka's Prime Minister declares 21 Amendment will be passed but opposition remains sceptical.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 29 May 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-s-prime-minister-declares-21-amendment-will-be-passed-opposition-remains-sceptical

"Even though there has been a change in the individual who is holding the post of Prime Minister, the Rajapaksas are very much in the governance. They haven't gone anywhere. They are showing Ranil Wickremesinghe as PM and he is also happy to do so. Unless this situation is changed, the country cannot come out from the economic crisis," said Sumanthiran. [100]

Sumanthiran also noted that the proposed 21st Amendment still enabled the President to hold any number of ministerial posts.

"The proposed draft strengthens presidential powers contrary to what was said about restoring 19A. Why can't they abolish the Executive Presidency altogether without reducing it at the token level?" he stated. [101]

In July 2022, after the election of Ranil Wickremesinghe as President, Sumanthiran restated his calls to "dissolve Parliament and call General Elections".[102]

In October 2022, the Sri Lankan parliament passed the 22nd Amendment to Sri Lanka's constitution aimed at curbing the powers of the executive presidency. Opposition MPs and human rights organisations maintain that the 22nd Amendment does not go far enough, as it fails to abolish the executive presidency, and allows retention of several key powers.[103]

"The president still retains the power to prorogue parliament, to hold ministries and the constitutional council will still have mostly government appointees" noted Bhavani Fonseka, a senior researcher at the Centre for Policy Alternatives, a Colombo-based think tank.[104]

The March 2023 Sri Lanka Report by the UN Human Rights Committee expressed concern that the amendment still appeared to allow the executive presidency to have undue influence on the independence of oversight institutions, including the judiciary and the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka. [105]

---

[100] **TNA demands dissolution of parliament.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 29 May 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tna-demands-dissolution-parliament

[101] **TNA demands dissolution of parliament.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 29 May 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tna-demands-dissolution-parliament

[102] **'There is no chance that he can bring stability' – Sumanthiran slams Sri Lanka's new President.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 24 July 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/there-no-chance-he-can-bring-stability-sumanthiran-slams-sri-lanka-s-new-president

[103] **'You are taking us for jokers!' – MA Sumanthiran slams 22nd Amendment.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 25 October 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/you-are-taking-us-jokers-ma-sumanthiran-slams-22nd-amendment

[104] **You are taking us for jokers!' – MA Sumanthiran slams 22nd Amendment.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 25th October 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/you-are-taking-us-jokers-ma-sumanthiran-slams-22nd-amendment

[105] **UN Human Rights Committee. Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Sri Lanka. 24th March 2023.** [point 11] https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2FC%2FLKA%2FCO%2F6&Lang=en

The UN Human Rights Committee expressed deep concern about 'the extreme delay in bringing to justice perpetrators of past human rights violations that occurred during the conflict. It regrets that domestic legislation does not criminalize war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.' The Committee expressed its 'concern about reports of interference in and obstruction of judicial and investigative processes by politicians and members of security force' and 'the continued appointment and promotion of military personnel, accused of war crimes during the conflict, which fosters a climate of impunity.' [106]

On 22 March 2023, the Wickremesinghe government published the proposed "Anti-Terrorism Bill" which, if adopted, would replace the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). The Anti-Terrorism Bill purports to do away with the provisions of the PTA that were considered in violation of international human rights law. However, the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) fear it will 'give rise to a panoply of human rights violations and, much as the existing PTA, is open to misuse'. The ICJ renewed its call on Sri Lanka to repeal the PTA and immediately halt attempts to replace it with an even worse piece of legislation that includes re-introducing the death penalty. [107]

The Anti-Terrorism Bill, "appears designed to give the president, police, and military broad powers to detain people without evidence, to make vaguely defined forms of speech a criminal offense, and to arbitrarily ban gatherings and organizations without meaningful judicial oversight" warned Human Rights Watch. Sri Lanka's police and military will have sweeping powers "to stop, question, search, and arrest anyone, or seize any document or object without a warrant, if they believe they have 'reasonable grounds'". The military will have 24 hours to transfer a detainee to police custody, placing detained people at greater risk of abuse. HRW have called for the repeal of the proposed Anti-Terrorism Bill.[108]

"The proposed counterterrorism law would permit the Sri Lankan government to continue to use draconian measures to silence peaceful critics and target minorities,"

said Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia director at Human Rights Watch.

"The government's crackdown on dissent and misuse of existing counterterrorism laws to arbitrarily detain protesters highlights the obvious risk of abuse." [109]

Tamil political parties opposed the Anti -Terrorism Bill, as a piece of legislation that violates human rights and has the potential to increase violence against

---

[106] **UN Human Rights Committee. Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Sri Lanka. 24th March 2023.** [point 11] https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2FC%2FLKA%2FCO%2F6&Lang=en

[107] **Sri Lanka: Proposed "anti-terror" bill set to introduce death penalty and break existing human rights violations record.** *ICJ* (online, 31st March 2023). https://www.icj.org/sri-lanka-proposed-anti-terror-bill-set-to-introduce-death-penalty-and-break-existing-human-rights-violations-record/

[108] **Sri Lanka: Reject New Counterterrorism Bill.** *Human Rights Watch* (online, 7 April 2023). https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/04/07/sri-lanka-reject-new-counterterrorism-bill

[109] **Sri Lanka: Reject New Counterterrorism Bill.** *Human Rights Watch* (online, 7 April 2023). https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/04/07/sri-lanka-reject-new-counterterrorism-bill

ethnic and religious minorities, journalists, dissenters, cooperatives, and trade unions. They called for a hartal (shutdown) on April 25th, 2023, throughout the North-East of the island to show opposition to the legislation and the ongoing Sinhalisation of the Tamil homeland and bring to light the ongoing oppression faced by Tamil and Muslim communities in Sri Lanka and the urgent need for the government to take action to address these issues.[110] The hartal caused a complete halt to all economic activities and movement of the public across the North-East.

In June 2023, Chairman of the Oversight Committee on National Security Rear Admiral Sarath Weerasekara MP, publicly denounced calls for repealing Sri Lanka's Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). This statement came as Sri Lanka faced growing international condemnation for its maintenance of the PTA which has been linked to arbitrary detention, torture and extrajudicial killings.[111]

In June 2023, Sri Lanka's Public Security Minister, Tiran Alles, called for the mandatory registration of non-governmental organisations, "so that we can monitor them closely" he said.[112]

In July 2023, Sri Lanka's main Tamil party Tamil National Alliance (TNA) demanded "enhanced and meaningful" devolution of power under the full implementation of the 13th Amendment to the country's Constitution.

"Our position is that power-sharing must be in a federal structure consistent with the aspirations of the Tamil people expressed at every election since 1956," the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) stated.[113]

In October 2023, the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) raised 'serious concerns' over the Anti-Terrorism Bill and the Online Safety Bill, two pieces of legislation being considered in Sri Lanka's parliament. Both Bills *"'give the authorities a range of expansive powers and can impose restrictions on human rights, not in line with international human rights law. The Anti-Terrorism Bill still includes an overly broad definition of terrorism and grants wide powers to the police - and to the military - to stop, question and search, and to arrest and detain people, with inadequate judicial oversight. The Online Safety Bill could potentially criminalize nearly all forms of legitimate expression, creating an*

---

[110] **Hartal opposing new anti-terror legislation and Sinhalisation brings North-East to a standstill.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 25 April 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/hartal-opposing-new-anti-terror-legislation-and-sinhalisation-brings-north-east-standstill

[111] **Sri Lanka's Public Security Minister bemoans weak response to accusations of genocide.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 13 June 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-s-public-security-minister-bemoans-weak-response-accusations-genocide

[112] **Sri Lankan Minister calls for NGOs to be monitored closely.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 13 June 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-minister-calls-ngos-be-monitored-closely

[113] **Sri Lanka's Main Party Demands 'enhanced And Meaningful' Devolution Of Power Under 13A.** *Republic World* (online, 31 July 2023). https://www.republicworld.com/world-news/rest-of-the-world-news/sri-lankas-main-party-demands-enhanced-and-meaningful-devolution-of-power-under-13a-articleshow.html

environment that has a chilling effect on freedom of expression," stated the OHCHR spokesperson. [114]

The International Commission of Jurists stated that several provisions of the Online Safety Bill would serve to undermine the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the country, including freedom of information and expression. The Bar Association of Sri Lanka called for the immediate withdrawal of the bill. [115]

A group of 125 civil society leaders and 37 organisations and collectives issued a statement on the Online Safety Bill and the Anti-Terrorism Bill alleging both will put an end to democracy and fundamental rights. They called upon the Government to withdraw both bills and engage in a public conversation with qualified persons and citizens on public policy.

Excerpts from the statement:

'The Online Safety Act will embed a culture of state harassment of online journalists and activists, artists, scholars, writers, trade unions, civil society organisations, including women's groups, human rights defenders, professional organisations, and any citizen who dares to criticise Government and disagree with its policies and governance.'

'Under the Anti-Terror Act (ATA) the definition of what comprises 'terrorism' is so vast and vague that any act can become an act of terror if the State deems it so. Any protest or strike can become an act of terror. Any instance of free speech can be deemed as inciting 'terrorism'. Any organisation can be proscribed as a 'terrorist' association. Any publication can be deemed a 'terrorist' publication. Anyone associated with 'terrorist' suspects, by virtue of association and knowledge, can be punished. Detentions will be made through executive orders and the military has been given powers to arrest and detain, powers which it did not have even under the PTA. The ATA will create a permanent state of emergency where Sri Lanka will effectively become a military state functioning under the exclusive dictate of the Executive.' [116]

In January 2024, the Speaker of Sri Lanka's Parliament Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena certified the Online Safety Bill with his signature making it into law. [117]

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said that the Online Safety Bill will have "far-reaching negative implications for

---

[114] **Human rights concerns over two draft laws in Sri Lanka. OHCHR. October 13th, 2023. Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights: Ravina Shamdasani. Geneva.** https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-briefing-notes/2023/10/human-rights-concerns-over-two-draft-laws-sri-lanka

[115] **Sri Lanka: Journalists and activists targeted, protests stifled and new restrictive laws proposed.** *CIVICUS* (online, 13th October 2023). https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/sri-lanka-journalists-and-activists-targeted-protests-stifled-and-new-restrictive-laws-proposed/

[116] **Online Safety Bill and Anti-Terror Bill: law making to end democracy and fundamental rights.** *FT Daily* (online, 23rd October 2023). https://www.ft.lk/opinion/Online-Safety-Bill-and-Anti-Terror-Bill-law-making-to-end-democracy-and-fundamental-rights/14-754373

[117] **OHCHR says Online Safety Bill will have 'far-reaching negative implications' for human rights.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 02 February 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/ohchr-says-online-safety-bill-will-have-far-reaching-negative-implications-human-rights

human rights including freedom of expression" and called on the Sri Lankan government to amend the bill to comply with its human rights obligations. [118]

In January 2024, Human Rights Watch warned that Sri Lanka's controversial Online Safety Bill could impede the freedom of expression on the internet at a time when the island prepares for parliamentary and presidential polls later this year.[119]

In October 2024, Sri Lanka's ruling National People's Power (NPP) announced that it would retain the controversial Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), breaking campaign pledges to repeal the draconian legislation. The PTA has been widely criticized by Tamils and international rights organizations as a tool of repression.[120]

In December 2024, Sri Lankan president Anura Kumara Dissanayake established a controversial new Presidential Task Force, with the heads of the armed forces and no Tamil or Muslim representation, with the goal "of elevating society to a more advanced status through a social, environmental and ethical awakening".[121]

In October 2025, the Human Rights Council at its 60th Session in Geneva, called upon the Government of Sri Lanka to:

'fulfil its commitments on the devolution of political authority, which is integral to reconciliation and the full enjoyment of human rights by all members of its population, and encouraged the Government to respect local governance, including through the holding of elections for provincial councils, and to ensure that all provincial councils, including the northern and eastern provincial councils, are able to operate effectively, in accordance with the thirteenth amendment to the Constitution of Sri Lanka.' [122]

The Human Rights Council also expressed concern at reports that detentions under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) continue, and 'have disproportionately affected individuals from Tamil and Muslim communities,' and urged the SL Government to 'apply a moratorium on the use of the law, to expedite its repeal and to ensure that any legislation on combating terrorism complies fully with the State's obligations arising from international law, including international human rights law.' [123]

---

[118] **OHCHR says Online Safety Bill will have 'far-reaching negative implications' for human rights.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 02 February 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/ohchr-says-online-safety-bill-will-have-far-reaching-negative-implications-human-rights

[119] **Sri Lanka's Proposed Internet Law Threatens Upcoming Elections.** *Human Rights Watch* (online, 23 January 2024). https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/01/23/sri-lankas-proposed-internet-law-threatens-upcoming-elections

[120] **Sri Lanka says it will not repeal draconian PTA law, breaking campaign pledge.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 29 October 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-says-it-will-not-repeal-draconian-pta-law-breaking-campaign-pledge

[121] **The 'Clean Sri Lanka' Task Force: militarised and exclusive**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, Dec 21, 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/clean-sri-lanka-task-force-militarised-and-exclusive

[122] **Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General.** Human Rights Council Sixtieth session,8 September–8 October 2025. https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/60/L.1/Rev.1

[123] Ibid.

Sri Lanka – a criminal state

White vans were routinely used by the Sri Lanka state to forcibly disappear countless individuals, particularly during the armed conflict and under the Rajapaksa regime. White van attacks, abductions and death threats continued under the Wickremesinghe government. Longstanding ties between Sri Lanka's political and military institutions, and their criminal networks that operate with impunity, continue under the Dissanayake government.

In February 2025, *Tamil Guardian* reported that Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake had admitted that "*Sri Lanka is a criminal state*," echoing the concerns of numerous human rights organisations regarding extrajudicial killings and systemic abuses perpetrated by state forces. *"There are a few in the military who are hired to go out and shoot to kill and come back to the camp,"* admitted Dissanayake in a public address. *"This is the situation of the country. Therefore, this is a criminal state. It is a type of state where nothing can be trusted at any time."* [124]

In March 2025*, Tamil Guardian Editorial* reported that a 'surge of assassinations, coming just months into Anura Kumara Dissanayake's presidency, has brought to light the longstanding ties between Sri Lanka's political and military institutions, and their criminal networks that operate with impunity. From torture and kidnappings to cold-blooded murders, for decades these networks have enjoyed the protection of powerful political figures and been activated at their behest. Left unchecked, they are continuing to wreak havoc.' [125]

'The connections between the state and these criminal groups are not isolated incidents but part of a larger, systemic issue. For decades, the military was able to activate these same networks and paramilitary forces to abduct, torture, and kill Tamils during the armed conflict. They were the ones who operated with impunity, orchestrating atrocities. They were the groups that abducted journalists and assassinated critics unchecked. They were the organisations that afforded the ruling Sinhala elite and the armed forces a veneer of separation as these crimes took place. The lack of accountability for these violations has allowed those networks to thrive. As recent events have demonstrated, they remain active and powerful.' [126]

In April 2025, Sri Lanka's Minister of Public Security and Parliamentary Affairs, Ananda Wijepala, commented that significant numbers of deserters from the Sri Lankan army, navy, and air force have re-emerged in the criminal underworld, with some forming connections within the police and security establishment itself. *Tamil Guardian* reported that 'the revelations follow increasing scrutiny

---

[124] **Missing weapons and military murders: Sri Lanka is 'criminal state' admits president.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 05 February 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/missing-weapons-and-military-murders-sri-lanka-criminal-state-admits-president

[125] **EDITORIAL - Sri Lanka's underworld rises to the surface.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 02 March 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankas-underworld-rises-surface

[126] **EDITORIAL - Sri Lanka's underworld rises to the surface.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 02 March 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankas-underworld-rises-surface

over the long-standing issue of impunity for former military personnel accused of grave human rights abuses. Observers have long warned that the state's failure to demobilise and hold to account tens of thousands of soldiers following the end of the armed conflict in 2009 has contributed to a dangerous culture of militarised violence.' [127]

In May 2025, Sri Lanka's Minister of Public Security, Ananda Wijepala, delivered a damning statement in Parliament, confirming that multiple senior politicians are linked to organised criminal syndicates, including groups involved in drug trafficking, contract killings, and international crime networks. The mention of figures from the United National Party (UNP), Samagi Jana Balawegaya party (SJB), and Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna party (SLPP) reflects a bipartisan corruption problem, reinforcing public concerns that both ruling and opposition parties have used criminal networks for political gain, voter intimidation, and profiteering. [128]

In September 2025, Tamil Guardian reported that Sri Lankan President Dissanayake had admitted that members of parliament and cabinet are directly linked to underworld figures running the island's sprawling criminal and drug networks. He warned that the criminal networks were deeply entrenched across the island and pledged "decisive action" to dismantle them. Despite his promises, Dissanayake's remarks have raised fresh questions over Sri Lanka's political establishment, where allegations of collusion between lawmakers, paramilitary groups, smugglers and drug traffickers have persisted for decades.[129]

In October 2025, Tamil Guardian reported that Sri Lankan opposition politician Lasantha Wickramasekara was shot dead inside his office in Weligama, Southern Province, marking the first assassination of a high-profile politician since Anura Kumara Dissanayake's government came to power. Wickramasekara, was chairman of the Weligama Pradeshiya Sabha and a member of the opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB). The motive behind the assassination remains uncertain. [130]

---

[127] **Sri Lankan Minister admits military deserters involved in crime wave, 1,700 arrested.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 9 April,2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/index.php/content/crackdown-armed-forces-deserters-1700-arrested-sri-lankas-fight-against-underworld-ties

[128] **Sri Lanka's Public Security Minister links politicians to organised crime and murder plots.** *Tamil Guardian* (online 21 May, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/public-security-minister-discloses-direct-links-between-politicians-and-crime-syndicates

[129] **'Like collecting taxes' - Sri Lankan president admits ministers linked to underworld.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, September 17, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/collecting-taxes-sri-lankan-president-admits-ministers-linked-underworld-drugs-and-crime

[130] **Sri Lankan opposition politician shot dead inside office.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, October 22, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-opposition-politician-shot-dead-inside-office

Attacks on journalists, lawyers & human rights organisations

Intimidation of Tamil journalists and human rights defenders in the highly militarized North and East of Sri Lanka continues with impunity. Threatening family members of human rights defenders is an additional burden to the hardship they are forced to endure.[131]

In March 2025, the UN Special Rapporteur Mary Lawlor presented her report titled 'Out of Sight: Human Rights Defenders Working in Isolated, Remote & Rural Contexts', to the United Nations Human Rights Council. The Report stated:

"The Special Rapporteur has also received information that, in Sri Lanka, defenders working in the conflict-affected North and East face disproportionate violence, surveillance and labelling as terrorists, and that many women human rights defenders have been labelled as anti-State and have faced violence, stigmatisation, and attacks during peaceful protests." [132]

For Tamil activists, the findings of this report reflect a long-standing pattern of state repression.

In August 2024, the Comprehensive Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Situation in Sri Lanka stated:

"Over the reporting period, OHCHR observed a persistent trend of surveillance, intimidation and harassment of journalists and civil society actors, especially those working on enforced disappearances, land seizures, environmental issues, and with former combatants in Sri Lanka's north and east."

"Journalists in these regions face abusive lawsuits, violence, intimidation, and surveillance." [133]

In March 2024, Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated in an Oral Update at the 55th Session of the Human Rights Council:

"My Office continues to receive allegations of surveillance, harassment and arrests by security forces of civil society representatives, journalists and victims, as well as

---

[131] **Continued Harassment Against Sri Lankan Human Rights Defender and Journalist Selvakumar Nilanthan.** *Frontline Defenders* (online, 05 December 2022). https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/continued-harassment-against-sri-lankan-human-rights-defender-selvakumar-nilanthan

[132] **Out of sight: human rights defenders working in isolated, remote and rural contexts. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor.** Published 3rd January 2025. **[paragraph 89]** Human Rights Council.

https://reliefweb.int/report/world/out-sight-human-rights-defenders-working-isolated-remote-and-rural-contexts-report-special-rapporteur-situation-human-rights-defenders-mary-lawlor-ahrc5853-enarruzh

[133] **A/HRC/57/19: Situation of human rights in Sri Lanka - Comprehensive report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights - Advance unedited version. Published 22 August 2024. [para. 21]** https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/ahrc5719-situation-human-rights-sri-lanka-comprehensive-report-united-nations

of people who have been involved in organising commemoration events for war victims." [134]

The March 2023 Sri Lanka Report by the UN Human Rights Committee states:

'The Committee is concerned about reports of severe restrictions on freedom of opinion and expression in the State party, such as:
Harassment, intimidation, surveillance, disappearances and killings of journalists, human rights activists and other media workers with impunity.' [135]

In July 2022, UN Human Rights Office spokesperson Jeremy Laurence condemned the reported beatings of protesters, journalists and lawyers in the days after the election of President Ranil Wickremesinghe. It was reported that security forces had attacked journalists and lawyers, especially those trying to record the events or carrying cameras or phones, with at least two arrested. At least four journalists were beaten and assaulted by the security forces. Two were hospitalized. [136] In its August 2022 report, Human Rights Watch also condemned the attack, stating that the Sri Lankan government was using emergency regulations to harass and arbitrarily detain activists seeking political reform and accountability for the country's economic crisis. [137]

The Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 reported that 'the government continued to harass, threaten and surveil victims' families, as well as lawyers and groups representing them. Intelligence agencies and the military interfere in the work of civil society organizations, particularly in the north and east, and suppress perceived dissent. Human rights organizations reported regular visits to their offices by security agencies including the police Terrorism Investigation Division.'[138]

In January 2021, the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, in her Report to the UN Human Rights Council, urged the Sri Lankan Government to order Sri Lankan authorities,

"to immediately end all forms of surveillance, including intimidating visits by State agents and harassment against human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, social actors and victims of human rights violations and their families, and to refrain

---

[134] **High Commissioner presents updates on human rights in Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Cyprus and Sri Lanka. OHCHR. 01 March 2024**. https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/03/high-commissioner-presents-updates-human-rights-colombia-guatemala

[135] **UN Human Rights Committee. Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Sri Lanka. 24th March 2023.** [point 40a]
https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2FC%2FLKA%2FCO%2F6&Lang=en

[136] **Comment by UN Human Rights Office spokesperson Jeremy Laurence on raid on Sri Lanka protest camp.** *OHCHR* (online, 22 July 2022). https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/07/comment-un-human-rights-office-spokesperson-jeremy-laurence-raid-sri-lanka

[137] **Sri Lanka: Heightened Crackdown on Dissent. End Arbitrary Arrests, Harassment of Protesters, Activists, Journalists.** *Human Rights Watch* (online, 2 August 2022).
https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/08/02/sri-lanka-heightened-crackdown-dissent

[138] **World Report 2022 -Sri Lanka. Human Rights Watch.** https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/sri-lanka

from imposing further restrictive legal measures on legitimate civil society activity," [139]

The Report stated:

"Significant challenges and negative trends have emerged over the past year which have profoundly changed the environment for reconciliation, accountability and human rights." [140]

The Report highlighted:

"i) militarization of civilian government functions; ii) reversal of Constitutional safeguards; iii) political obstruction of accountability for crimes and human rights violations; iv) majoritarian and exclusionary rhetoric; v) surveillance and obstruction of civil society and shrinking democratic space; and vi) new and exacerbated human rights concerns. The High Commissioner is concerned these represent important early warning indicators that require the Human Rights Council's urgent attention." [141]

In September 2021, the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, in her Oral Update to the UN Human Rights Council stated that:

"Regrettably, surveillance, intimidation and judicial harassment of human rights defenders, journalists and families of the disappeared has not only continued, but has broadened to a wider spectrum of students, academics, medical professionals and religious leaders critical of government policies. Several peaceful protests and commemorations have been met with excessive use of force and the arrest or detention of demonstrators in quarantine centres."

"New regulations on civil society groups are being drafted, and it is widely feared that they will further tighten restrictions on fundamental freedoms. I am deeply concerned about further deaths in police custody, …. as well as continuing reports of torture and ill-treatment by law enforcement officials." [142]

An Amnesty International Report published in May 2021 stated that "human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers and criminal investigators, came under increased intimidation and harassment during 2020. Law enforcement officials paid unannounced visits to human rights organizations and enquired about their

---

[139] **Sri Lanka on alarming path towards recurrence of grave human rights violations – UN report.** *Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights* (online 27 January 2021) https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26695&LangID=E

[140] **Promotion reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka. Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Advance unedited version. Distr.: General. 27 January 2021** (page 6, point 18). https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/LK/Sri_LankaReportJan2021.docx

[141] **Promotion reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka. Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Advance unedited version. Distr.: General. 27 January 2021** (page 6, point 19). https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/LK/Sri_LankaReportJan2021.docx

[142] **Oral Update on the human rights situation in Sri Lanka. Statement by Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.** September 2021. https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27447&LangID=E

work and funders. At least 18 such visits were recorded in the north, east and west of Sri Lanka during the year and 13 incidents of intimidation of journalists. Dharisha Bastians, former editor of a state-owned newspaper and New York Times correspondent, was under investigation for reporting on various cases and human rights issues."[143]

In August 2020, Human Rights Watch (HRW) expressed deep concern regarding a 'campaign of fear and intimidation against human rights activists, journalists, lawyers, and others challenging government policy' being waged by the Rajapaksa government.

At the time of the HRW report over 66,000 individuals had been arrested for allegedly breaching curfew. Contact-tracing was run by the military and there was no confidentiality in the process. On 1 April 2020 it was announced by the police that any criticism of this response would result in arrest.[144]

In February 2020, the UN High Commissioner noted that Sri Lankans who had travelled to attend sessions of the Human Rights Council had been questioned about their trips. In March 2020, several participants at the Council's session reported having been questioned before and after travel and surveilled during Council sessions and NGO side events. In December 2019, the Assistant Secretary-General addressed patterns of intimidation and reprisals in writing to the Government.[145]

In August 2020, the NGO Secretariat, which oversees the non-government organisations working in Sri Lanka, was placed under the purview of the Defence Ministry. Thirty other state organisations were also placed under Defence Ministry control.[146]

In September 2020, the Director of the NGO Secretariat, Raja Gunaratne, told local Newspaper the *Sunday Observer* that 'some NGOs pose a serious threat to national security, spreading extremist ideologies. And discussions are underway to draft a new Act to overcome these drawbacks.'[147] Human Rights Watch links this move to the work of human rights organisations in holding the Rajapaksa government accountable for the war crimes committed between 2005 and 2015.[148]

---

[143] **Sri Lanka 2020.** Amnesty International. May 2021. https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/asia-and-the-pacific/sri-lanka/report-sri-lanka/

[144] **Sri Lanka: Increasing Suppression of Dissent.** *Human Rights Watch* (online, 8 August 2020) https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/08/sri-lanka-increasing-suppression-dissent

[145] **Human Rights Council, Forty-fifth session 14 September–2 October 2020.** Agenda items 2 &5. https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Reprisals/A_HRC_45_36.docx

[146] **Sri Lanka: Increasing Suppression of Dissent.** *Human Rights Watch* (online, 8 August 2020) https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/08/sri-lanka-increasing-suppression-dissent

[147] Tharaka Wickremasekera. **New laws for NGOs on the cards.** *Sunday Observer* (online, 27 September 2020) http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2020/09/27/news/new-laws-ngos-cards

[148] **Sri Lanka: Increasing Suppression of Dissent.** *Human Rights Watch* (online, 8 August 2020) https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/08/sri-lanka-increasing-suppression-dissent

Further highlighting the censorship imposed by the new administration, Inform, a Sri Lankan human rights group, reported that, from January 1, 2021, to March 31, 2021, alone, there were 78 reported incidents of repression of dissent, with individual incidents often including multiple people. The majority of these were against journalists, protestors in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, and activists and civil society organisations. The highest number of incidents indicated '*systematic discrimination and targeting of the country's ethnic minorities, especially of Tamil individuals'*. The perpetrators were predominantly linked to the state, including military, police, state institutions and officials, courts, and politicians.[149]

In November 2020, Sarath Weerasekara, was sworn in as Minister of Public Security. Retired Rear Admiral Weerasekara is known as an ultra-nationalist who has previously called for civil society groups and NGOs to be charged with treason and sentenced to death if they 'slander the government'.[150] Weerasekara remained in the role of Minister of Public Security until April 2022.

Attacks against journalists

The 2025 World Press Freedom Index, compiled by Reporters Without Borders, ranked Sri Lanka 139 out of a total of 180 countries.[151] Reporters without Borders reported that:

'Journalism is still in danger in this country of 22 million inhabitants, as the media landscape lacks diversity, is highly concentrated and dependant on major political clans. The authorities often use the prevention of terrorism law to silence journalists, especially those who try to investigate the living conditions of the Tamil minority in the north and east of the island. Generally, covering issues involving the Tamil or Muslim minorities is extremely sensitive. Journalists and media outlets who have risked doing so in recent years have been subjected to arrests, death threats and coordinated cyber-attacks.' [152]

In September 2025, the International Truth and Justice Project (ITPJ) released a new report *'Killing Sri Lankan journalists: The Case of Nimalarajan Mylvaganam'*.[153] The government-aligned paramilitary group the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) is suspected of carrying out the killing. The report underscores that Sri Lanka's systemic failure to prosecute those responsible for

[149] **Repression of Dissent in Sri Lanka, 1 January 2021- 31 March 2021.** *Inform* https://www.inform.lk/repression-of-dissent-in-sri-lanka-january-march-2021/

[150] **Retired Sri Lankan Admiral Weerasekara calls for the abolition of 19th amendment.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 8 August 2020) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/retired-sri-lankan-admiral-weerasekara-calls-abolition-19th-amendment

[151] **2025 World Press Freedom Index. Reporters Without Borders**. https://rsf.org/en/index

[152] **Sri Lanka 2025.** *Reporters Without Borders*. https://rsf.org/en/country/sri-lanka

[153] **'Killing Sri Lankan journalists: The Case of Nimalarajan Mylvaganam'. ITJP. 2025.** https://itjpsl.com/assets/KILLING-SRI-LANKAN-JOURNALISTS_THE-CASE-OF-NIMALARAJAN-MYLVAGANAM_Final_ENGLISH_Web_compressed.pdf

Nimalarajan Mylvaganam's murder, enabled further violations particularly against Tamil journalists in the North-East. [154]

In September 2025, Tamil Guardian reported that the Sri Lankan Government had publicly accused prominent Tamil journalist and human rights defender Kumanan Kanapathipillai of "terrorist activities and financial crime" during a UN session. The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders has previously raised concerns about the intimidation of Kumanan Kanapathilpillai. "We are now increasingly worried for his safety, as it is clear the government is engaging in a witch hunt determined to silence him and his journalistic activities," a source told the Tamil Guardian. [155]

Reporters without Borders in 2024 reported that: Officials regularly invoked the anti-terrorism law to silence journalists, especially those who try to report on conditions for the Tamil minority in the island's north and east. State-owned media dominated the sector. The most independent news content comes from online networks. Journalists who run them, however, are not exempt from pressure and intimidation. Reporters based in the north and on the east coast, the traditional Tamil homeland, suffer systematic surveillance and harassment by the police and army.[156] According to the Jaffna Press Club, 'The Tamil media field was and continues to be the most frequent target of threats and killings in Sri Lanka.[157]

In November 2024, plainclothes Sri Lankan police officers raided the home of the elderly father of exiled Tamil journalist Punniyamoorthy Sasikaran, subjecting him to intense interrogation. Sasikaran, a well-known Eelam Tamil journalist, had long been a target of intimidation due to his reporting on sensitive issues, including government actions and Tamil grievances. The intense harassment eventually drove Sasikaran to leave Sri Lanka, citing continuous threats to his life from both Sri Lankan government forces and armed paramilitary groups. [158]

In October 2024, S. Nilanthan, a Batticaloa-based Tamil journalist, was arrested for his reporting on alleged corruption involving a local Sri Lankan government official and ordered to appear in court. He faced charges that he sees as an attempt to criminalize his work as a journalist. He added that the harassment he has endured has taken a severe emotional toll on him and his family, with his

---

[154] **New report highlights Sri Lanka's investigative failures in Tamil journalist's murder.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, September 08, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/new-report-highlights-sri-lankas-investigative-failures-tamil-journalists-murder

[155] **Sri Lanka accuses Tamil reporter of 'terrorist activity' at UN.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, September 30, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-accuses-tamil-reporter-terrorist-activity-un

[156] **Sri Lanka 2024.** *Reporters Without Borders*. https://rsf.org/en/country/sri-lanka

[157] **No justice for crimes against journalists in Sri Lanka - Jaffna Press Club**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, 8 November 2020) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/no-justice-crimes-against-journalists-sri-lanka-jaffna-press-club

[158] **Exiled Tamil journalist's family targeted by Sri Lankan police.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 11 November 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/exiled-tamil-journalist-s-family-targeted-sri-lankan-police

children and wife urging him to step back from his journalism career out of fear for their safety.[159]

In August 2024, Sri Lankan police summoned Mullaitivu based journalist Shanmugam Thavaseelan for interrogation. Thavaseelan has been subject to harassment, intimidation and violence for his work on multiple occasions. [160]

In November 2023, Front Line Defenders reported extreme concern for the safety of Batticaloa journalist Valasingham Krishnakumar who, it believes, is facing reprisals and legal action due to his peaceful human rights work and journalism. The human rights defender has been targeted by state authorities through interrogation by intelligence officers, court orders and legal proceedings, surveillance, and intimidation - including visits by intelligence officers to his home in Batticaloa. [161]

In July 2023, Tharindu Uduwaragedara, a Sri Lankan human rights defender and journalist, was assaulted and unlawfully detained by the Borella Police while covering a peaceful trade union protest in Colombo, Sri Lanka. [162]

In August 2023, three Tamil journalists and Tamil farmers were held for 5 hours and harassed by an armed Sinhalese mob, after they reported on alleged state-backed encroachments on Tamil cattle farmers' land in the Mylathamadu area of the eastern district of Batticaloa. Journalist Nilanthan was forced to delete photos and videos of farmers' testimonies and the mob setting fire to the land. He was forced to sign two letters in Sinhala and Tamil stating that he would not report on the incident. *"Tamil journalists have a right to report on issues affecting their community without interference or fear of reprisal",* said Carlos Martinez de la Serna, Committee to Protect Journalists program director. [163]

In April 2023, journalist and human rights defender Ramachandran Sanath was summoned to appear before the Terrorism Investigation Department (TID) in Central Province. The TID refused to disclose the purpose of the inquiry. Human

---

[159] **'I was treated like a murderer' - Sri Lankan police arrest Tamil journalist after exposing government corruption.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 21 October 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/i-was-treated-murderer-sri-lankan-police-arrest-tamil-journalist-after-exposing-government

[160] **Sri Lankan police summon Tamil journalist for interrogation.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 09 August 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-police-summon-tamil-journalist-interrogation

[161] **Intimidation and harassment against human rights defender and journalist valasingham Krishnakumar.** *Front Line Defenders* (online, November 2023). https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/intimidation-and-harassment-against-human-rights-defender-and-journalist-valasingham

[162] **Sri Lanka: Journalists and activists targeted, protests stifled and new restrictive laws proposed.** *CIVICUS* (online, 13th October 2023). https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/sri-lanka-journalists-and-activists-targeted-protests-stifled-and-new-restrictive-laws-proposed/

[163] **Sri Lankan mob holds 3 journalists captive for 5 hours.** *Committee to Protect Journalists* (online, August 30, 2023). https://cpj.org/2023/08/sri-lankan-mob-holds-3-journalists-captive-for-5-hours/

rights organisation Front Line Defenders believes it is linked to his human rights and journalism work.[164]

In February 2022 the residence of Colombo-based journalist, Chamuditha Samarawickrama, was attacked by masked gunmen travelling in a white van. The attack took place just 14 days ahead of a UN Human Rights Council session and followed a series of controversial videos released by the journalist, the latest of which laid allegations against the extremist Buddhist monk Galabadaththe Gnanasara who heads Sri Lanka's task force for 'One Country, One Law'. [165]

In December 2022 Tamil Guardian reported that Sri Lankan police had visited the home of journalist Selvakumar Nilanthan in Batticaloa and interrogated his family about his whereabouts. Nilanthan was forced to leave Sri Lanka 8 months earlier due to continuous threats and intimidation. Police threatened the family that if Nilanthan did not respond to police summons the family would be forced to appear instead.[166]

In February 2022, freelance journalist Nilanthan, secretary of the Batticaloa District Tamil Journalists Association, was interrogated twice by officers from Sri Lanka's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) about alleged links to the Tamil diaspora. [167] These interrogations had followed over two years of previous interrogations and threats. In January 2020, unidentified people circulated leaflets in Batticaloa, Eastern Province, stating that Nilanthan and six other journalists would be "given death punishment" for writing critically about the Sri Lankan government. In November 2020, police in Batticaloa district questioned Nilanthan at his home after he reported on the concerns of Tamil dairy farmers following the growth of military-backed Sinhalese settlements in the district. In July 2021, officers with the Batticaloa district's Terrorism Investigation Division, interrogated Nilanthan, and in August 2021 officers from the Batticaloa Special Crime Branch interrogated journalist Sasikaran, treasurer of the Batticaloa District Tamil Journalists Association.

Steven Butler, Committee to Protect Journalists' Asia program coordinator said,

"Police should not be using intimidation tactics to prevent journalists from covering protests by Sri Lanka's Tamil community, or any others." [168] [169]

---

[164] **Journalist and human rights defender Ramachandran Sanath summoned for interrogation by the Terrorist Investigation Department.** *Front Line Defenders* (online, 5th April 2023) https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/journalist-and-human-rights-defender-ramachandran-sanath-summoned-interrogation-terrorist

[165] **Gunmen in white van attack journalist in Sri Lanka.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 14 February 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/gunmen-white-van-attack-journalist-sri-lanka

[166] **Sri Lankan police interrogate Tamil journalist's family.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 01 December 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-police-interrogate-tamil-journalist-s-family

[167] **Sri Lanka's Criminal Investigation Department interrogates Tamil journalist.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 13 February 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankas-criminal-investigation-department-interrogates-tamil-journalist

[168] **Sri Lankan anti-terror authorities interrogate journalist Selvakumar Nilanthan.** *Committee to Protect Journalists* (online, 14 July 2021) https://cpj.org/2021/07/sri-lankan-anti-terror-authorities-interrogate-journalist-selvakumar-nilanthan/

In December 2021, Saheer Ahmed, a Muslim journalist based in Amparai, Eastern Province, received a death threat from a police officer from the Akkaraipattu station. The police officer threatened him with disappearance and death if he did not obey his orders, which included dropping complaints of human rights abuses made against the policeman. [170]

In November 2021, Tamil journalist Vishwalingam Vishwachandran was attacked and beaten with a palm frond wrapped in barbed wire by military men in Mullaitivu, Northern Province, suffering serious injuries to his stomach, arms, and leg. [171]

Attacks against Lawyers and Judges

In May 2024, the UN Human Rights Office issued a report on accountability for enforced Disappearances in Sri Lanka, which stated that "Lawyers reported to OHCHR that currently there is an inadequate system of protection for victims. Lawyers also reported that they themselves are subject to intimidation and reprisals. Frequently the threat comes within the security forces or law enforcement (including those that have responsibility for conducting investigations.)" [172]

Former President of the Bar Association of Sri Lanka Saliya Pieris linked heightening attacks on the judiciary to the period after Ranil Wickremesinghe became President. He cited threats against Supreme Court Judges and Parliamentary criticism of specific cases that have emerged since Ranil Wickremesinghe took office as Sri Lanka's president, suggesting that judicial independence is under threat in the country. [173]

In September 2023, Judge T. Saravanarajah, a judge in the Mullaitivu district of Sri Lanka's Northern Province, resigned and fled Sri Lanka claiming threats to his life from former Minister of Public Security Sarath Weerasekera and other politicians within the Sinhala Buddhist community; intense pressure from Government over two significant cases he had presided over; and surveillance by government intelligence officers. The Judge had ruled against the building of a

---

[169] **Sri Lanka police repeatedly interrogate journalist Punniyamoorthy Sasikaran.** *Committee to Protect Journalists* (online, 25 August 2021) https://cpj.org/2021/08/sri-lanka-police-repeatedly-interrogate-journalist-punniyamoorthy-sasikaran/

[170] **'Your name will appear on the disappeared persons list' - Sri Lankan police warn Muslim journalist.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 22 December 2021). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/your-name-will-appear-disappeared-persons-list-sri-lankan-police-warn-muslim-journalist

[171] **Sri Lanka military to probe itself over alleged torture of Tamil journalist.** *Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka* (online, 29 November 2021). http://www.jdslanka.org/index.php/news-features/politics-a-current-affairs/1061-sri-lanka-military-to-probe-itself-over-alleged-torture-of-tamil-journalist

[172] **Accountability for enforced disappearances in Sri Lanka. OHCHR**, 17 May 2024, para. 94. https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/accountability-enforced-disappearances-sri-lanka-ohchr-report

[173] **Resignation and flight of Sri Lanka judge sparks concern over nation's judicial independence.** *Jurist* (online, 30 September 2023). https://www.jurist.org/news/2023/09/resignation-and-flight-of-sri-lanka-judge-sparks-concern-over-nations-judicial-independence/

Buddhist shrine at Kurunthurmalai, an ancient Tamil Hindu temple site. Pressure from the Attorney General of Sri Lanka compelled him to reverse his ruling. The second case pertained to the Sri Lankan government's stifling of a memorial event honouring a deceased member of the Tamil separatist rebel group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Additionally, in July 2023, Saravanaraja ordered excavations at a mass grave site in Kokkuthoduvai, adding to the growing list of sensitive issues in the region. [174]

Tamil National Alliance MP Shanakiyan Rajaputhiran Rasamanickam said that if a judge is forced to flee a country it shows the plight of activists, journalists and ordinary citizens. [175]

Human rights lawyer K.S. Ratnavel said, *"If a judge had to flee the country due to threats, it reflects on the state of the rule of law in the country and the judiciary. If a judge cannot be safe, how can an ordinary citizen be protected?"* [176]

Since Judge T Saravanarajah fled the nation, lawyers have boycotted court proceedings and rallies have taken place in Northern and Eastern provinces, demanding independence of the judiciary.

In August 2021, Tamil Guardian reported that over 70 individuals and organisations, including prominent religious leaders and human rights advocates in Sri Lanka, had demanded the immediate release of prominent lawyer Hejaaz Hizbullah who had been detained under the country's draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act for over 500 days. Hizbullah was recognised as a Prisoner of Conscience by Amnesty International on 14th July 2021. The statement highlighted the detention of Hizbullah as an emblematic case, reflecting "egregious human rights abuses that take place under the PTA". Included in this is "the fact that Tamil persons have endured prolonged detention both at the pre-trial and trial stages under the PTA". They further noted that "detainees have been acquitted after detention periods of up to fifteen years". [177] [See also the chapter on the PTA on pages 98-104 of this report.]

In February 2022 Hejaaz Hizbullah was finally released, following almost 2 years in Sri Lankan detention. However, the lawyer was only granted bail and Sri Lankan authorities can still detain and charge him under the draconian act,

---

[174] **Resignation and flight of Sri Lanka judge sparks concern over nation's judicial independence. Jurist** (online, 30 September 2023). https://www.jurist.org/news/2023/09/resignation-and-flight-of-sri-lanka-judge-sparks-concern-over-nations-judicial-independence/

[175] **Concerns raised after judge flees Sri Lanka fearing for his life.** *Colombo Gazette* (online, 30 September, 2023). https://colombogazette.com/2023/09/30/concerns-raised-after-judge-flees-sri-lanka-fearing-for-his-life/

[176] **Lawyers, civil society support judge who fled Sri Lanka.** *UCA News* (online, 4th October 2023). https://www.ucanews.com/news/lawyers-civil-society-support-judge-who-fled-sri-lanka/102798

[177] **Over 70 individuals and organisations demand the release of Hizbullah**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, 29 August 2020). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/over-70-individuals-and-organisations-demand-release-hizbullah

which for decades has been slammed by human rights organisations around the world.

"Ever since he was arrested in April 2020, prosecutors have only brought baseless accusations against him," said Yamini Mishra, Amnesty International's South Asia Director. "*Hejaaz is a respected lawyer and minority rights activist who should have never been detained in the first place."* [178]

Forced disappearances

Families of the Disappeared

Amnesty International estimates that there have been at least 60,000 and as many as 100,000 cases of enforced disappearance in Sri Lanka since the 1980s.[179] According to cases outstanding before the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances in 2021, Sri Lanka had the second largest number of enforced disappearances in the world, recorded at 6,259. [180]

The Office on Missing Persons is the Sri Lankan organisation responsible for "protecting the rights of the missing and disappeared and their families." [181]

In April 2025, Tamil Guardian reported that Families of the Disappeared continue to face heavy surveillance and intimidation by the Sri Lankan state. In Vavuniya relatives of the disappeared and journalists were photographed and harassed by Sri Lankan intelligence operatives at a memorial gathering honouring the death of Pope Francis. This has once again underscored the climate of fear and repression that persists in the North-East, despite international scrutiny. [182]

In October 2024, Manel Udayachandra, the President of the Mannar District Families of the Disappeared organization was harassed by Sri Lankan police. Selvarani Thambirasa, the head of the Association for Enforced Disappearances (AERD) in Amparai, also revealed that she had been interrogated by Sri Lankan police. During the interrogation, Thambirasa was accused of helping to "regroup

---

[178] **Free at last? Hejaaz released on bail, but Sri Lanka's terrorism law looms large.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 9 February 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/free-last-hejaaz-released-bail-sri-lanka-s-terrorism-law-looms-large

[179] **Still No Answers- An update on the rights of victims of enforced disappearances in Sri Lanka. Amnesty International 2022**. https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/ASA3752782022ENGLISH.pdf

[180] **Report of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, August 2021,** A/HRC/48/57, https://undocs.org/A/HRC/48/57

[181] The official website of the **Office on Missing Persons** http://www.omp.gov.lk/missing-persons

[182] **Memorial for Pope Francis in Vavuniya marred by Sri Lankan intelligence surveillance.** *Tamil Guardian* (online 28 April, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/relatives-disappeared-hold-memorial-pope-francis-amidst-intimidation-vavuniya

the LTTE," an allegation that has been used re peatedly by the Sri Lankan government to silence Tamil activists.[183]

In August 2024, the Comprehensive Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Situation in Sri Lanka stated:

"During the reporting period, OHCHR received six reported cases of intimidation, surveillance, and reprisals against family members of the disappeared engaging with the UN or international actors, including members of the diplomatic community. Female victims in particular, reported receiving late-night calls from individuals claiming to be CID or TID personnel, who questioned them about their participation in protests and visits to Colombo or Geneva, including funding and individuals they had met." [184]

In August 2024, Mariyasuresh Eswari, Chairperson of the Mullaitivu District Association of the Tamil Families of the Disappeared, reported that officials from Sri Lanka's Office of Missing Persons (OMP) had begun threatening the families of the disappeared, demanding that they stop their protests. [185]

In August 2024, Rajkumar Rajeevkanth, an activist from the People's Struggle Alliance, was arrested in Trincomalee by Sri Lankan police. He was participating in protests organised by the Tamil Families of the Disappeared. [186]

In May 2024, the Office of the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner released the report 'Accountability for Enforced Disappearances in Sri Lanka' stating that the risk of future enforced disappearances remains today as Sri Lanka has failed to "tackle structural weaknesses and to undertake necessary reform." [187]

In March 2024, Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated in an Oral Update at the 55th Session of the Human Rights Council:

---

[183] **Sri Lankan police target yet another Tamil mother of the disappeared.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 21 October 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-police-target-yet-another-tamil-mother-disappeared

[184] **A/HRC/57/19: Situation of human rights in Sri Lanka - Comprehensive report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights - Advance unedited version. Published 22 August 2024, [para. 22].** https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/ahrc5719-situation-human-rights-sri-lanka-comprehensive-report-united-nations

[185] **Sri Lanka's OMP officers threaten Tamil families of the disappeared.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 29 August 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankas-omp-officers-threaten-tamil-families-disappeared

[186] **Sri Lanka: Civic space restrictions and targeting of activists persist as new government takes power.** CVIVUS Monitor (online, 13 January 2025). https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/sri-lanka-civic-space-restrictions-and-targeting-of-activists-persist-as-new-government-takes-power/

[187] **Accountability for Enforced Disappearances in Sri Lanka - OHCHR report. 17th May 2024.** https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/accountability-enforced-disappearances-sri-lanka-ohchr-report

"Tens of thousands of families of the disappeared are still looking for their loved ones and face intimidation, arrests and violence in their search." [188]

The March 2023, Amnesty International report, 'The State of the World's Human Rights' noted that Tamil families of the disappeared do not have any confidence in domestic mechanisms such as the Office of Missing Persons which has failed to provide answers. The state's forces have repeatedly subjected them to intense surveillance and harassment, and they have been "pressured to accept financial compensation and death certificates in lieu of certificates of absence until the fate of those forcibly disappeared could be ascertained." [189]

The March 2023 Report on Sri Lanka by the UN Human Rights Committee states that the Committee:

'Is concerned by the lack of progress in clarifications of the whereabouts and fate of persons subjected to enforced disappearances and of the appointments to these bodies of individuals implicated in the past human rights violations and interference in prosecutions of such cases, which deters victims and their relatives from seeking justice.'[190]

In January 2023, the Sri Lankan army intervened to prevent the Tamil Families of the Disappeared from participating in peaceful protests in Jaffna, disrupting their journey from Mullaitivu to Jaffna. They engaged in tactics of intimidation and noted down the details of the travelers' vehicles. Peaceful protesters in Jaffna were subjected to the violent use of riot shields and water cannons by Sri Lankan police.[191]

'Since the election of Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the Sri Lankan police, military and intelligence forces have escalated pressure against leaders in associations of the families of the disappeared, who are predominantly women, through increasingly severe threats and harassment that are intended to deter and silence existing and future activism' stated the Jaffna-based Adayaalam Centre for Policy Research in a briefing released in May 2022. [192] Drawing on interviews with the families themselves, the briefing outlined the threats and harassment they face as part of state efforts to nullify their protests. Families of

---

[188] **High Commissioner presents updates on human rights in Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Cyprus and Sri Lanka. OHCHR. 01 March 2024.** https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/03/high-commissioner-presents-updates-human-rights-colombia-guatemala

[189] **Amnesty International Report 2022/2023. The State of the World's Human Rights. SRI LANKA 2022. Amnesty International. March 2023.** https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/asia-and-the-pacific/south-asia/sri-lanka/report-sri-lanka/

[190] **UN Human Rights Committee. Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Sri Lanka. 24th March 2023.** [point 12]. https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2FC%2FLKA%2FCO%2F6&Lang=en

[191] **'The latest attempt to suppress a peaceful protest in the North and East' – Adayaalam, PEARL & TCSF.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 19 January 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/latest-attempt-suppress-peaceful-protest-north-and-east-adayaalam-pearl-tcsf

[192] **Situation Briefing No.6: Deteriorating Security Situation for Families of the Disappeared in the North-East of Sri Lanka.** Adayaalam Centre for Policy Research. May 2022. http://adayaalam.org/situation-briefing-no-6-deteriorating-security-situation-for-families-of-the-disappeared-in-the-north-east-of-sri-lanka/

the disappeared feel increasingly isolated from their communities' support and protection due to the systematic intimidation of their relatives, friends, and neighbors.

President Wickremesinghe's callous remarks in the past, on the struggle to find answers to the whereabouts of the forcibly disappeared, remain fresh in the minds of Tamils. In 2016, he triggered outrage amongst Tamils in the North-East, when he twice claimed that the thousands of Tamils that surrendered during the final phase of the armed conflict or were forcibly disappeared were "most probably dead". He offered no explanation as to who killed them or why they had died. In 2019, at an event in Kilinochchi, he told Tamils to "forget the past and move forward." [193]

In October 2022, the chairman of Sri Lanka's Office of Missing Persons, Mahesh Katundala, claimed "there was no evidence" that the many thousands of Tamils who had surrendered to the Sri Lankan military in 2009 had been abducted by the security forces. For more than 13 years, Tamil families across the North-East have demanded to know the whereabouts of their loved ones. Many of them personally witnessed handing over their relatives to the army. Katundala however, claimed it was the LTTE who had abducted the "majority" of the disappeared people.[194]

"Although the purpose of the Office is to trace and search for the missing, it has not been able to trace a single disappeared person or clarify the fate of the disappeared in meaningful ways, and its current purpose is to expedite the closure of files."
stated the Situation of Human Rights in Sri Lanka -Comprehensive Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in October 2022.[195]

This Report further stated that:
'Families of the disappeared face surveillance, questioning, intimidation and unannounced visits by intelligence and police officers, especially when they are actively involved in protests or memorialization. As highlighted in previous reports, women are particularly affected, given their prominent role in advocating for justice. Civil society organizations throughout the country continue to be questioned about their work and funding sources.[196]

---

[193] **Ranil Wickremesinghe declared Sri Lanka's president.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 20 July 2022) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/ranil-wickremesinghe-declared-sri-lanka-s-president

[194] '**No genocide in Sri Lanka' - OMP chairman denies surrendered Tamils are missing.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 26 October 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/no-genocide-sri-lanka-omp-chairman-denies-surrendered-tamils-are-missing

[195] **A/HRC/51/5: Situation of human rights in Sri Lanka - Comprehensive report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.** Published 04 October 2022. [pages 9-10, Section V A: 42]. https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/ahrc515-situation-human-rights-sri-lanka-comprehensive-report-united-nations-high

[196] **A/HRC/51/5: Situation of human rights in Sri Lanka - Comprehensive report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.** Published 04 October 2022. [page 7, Section 1V D: 31]. https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/ahrc515-situation-human-rights-sri-lanka-comprehensive-report-united-nations-high

On March 20th, 2022, families of Tamils who were disappeared during Sri Lanka's armed conflict, led mostly by elderly mothers, were on their way to protest Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa's visit to Jaffna when they were locked inside a bus by Sri Lankan police officers in Madduvil. They were then pushed, beaten, and trampled so badly that the coordinator of the Mullaitivu Disappeared Relatives' Association and a mother of the disappeared from Vavuniya had to be admitted to their district hospital for a two-day stay. Villagers who witnessed the incident described their feelings of helplessness at not being able to intervene because they were surrounded by armed police, Special Task Force and military officers. [197]

Speaking in September 2021 at the 48th UN Human Rights Council session, Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparations and guarantees of non-recurrence, Fabian Salvioli said:

"The last 18 months [in Sri Lanka] have witnessed a profound deterioration in the human rights situation, which jeopardizes the transitional justice process".

"I deeply regret the lack of implementation of the recommendations made in the report, the insufficient progress in relation to the search for the truth, and the flagrant setback in the areas of accountability, memory and guarantees of non-repetition" [198]

In May 2021, the Parliament Council appointed former Inspector General of Police, Hapu Arachchige Jayantha Shantha Kumara Wickremaratne as a member of the Office of Missing Persons. The International Truth and Justice Project (ITJP) said the appointment of the war time police chief to the Office of Missing Persons "completes the militarisation of this transitional justice mechanism" and "obliterates any chance of truth and justice" for Tamil families of the disappeared.[199]

In June 2021, the UN Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet expressed concern regarding the recent appointments to Sri Lanka's Office of Missing Persons and Office for Reparations and that steps to discourage investigations into past crimes, are further undermining victims' trust.[200]

---

[197] **Situation Briefing No.6: Deteriorating Security Situation for Families of the Disappeared in the North-East of Sri Lanka.** Adayaalam Centre for Policy Research. May 2022. http://adayaalam.org/situation-briefing-no-6-deteriorating-security-situation-for-families-of-the-disappeared-in-the-north-east-of-sri-lanka/

[198] **Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence. Fabián Salvioli**. September 2021. Human Rights Council, Forty-eighth session. [Sri Lanka page 19] https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/A_HRC_48_60_Add.2_E.pdf

[199] **Appointment of former police chief to OMP 'obliterates any chance of truth and justice' says ITJP.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 1 June 2021). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/appointment-former-police-chief-omp-obliterates-any-chance-truth-and-justice-says-itjp

[200] **UN rights chief voices concern over Sri Lanka's counter-terrorism laws.** *Adaderana.lk* (online, 21 June 2021). http://www.adaderana.lk/news/74822/un-rights-chief-voices-concern-over-sri-lankas-counter-terrorism-laws

In March 2021, the United Nations Human Rights Council passed a resolution on accountability and justice in Sri Lanka to mandate the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to "collect" as well as "consolidate, analyse and preserve" evidence that could be used in future war crimes trials. The resolution also expressed *"serious concern at the trends emerging over the past year, which represent a clear early warning sign of a deteriorating situation of human rights* in *Sri Lanka"* and highlighted "*ongoing impunity and political obstruction of accountability for crimes and human rights violations"*.[201] In October 2022, the UN Human Rights Council adopted resolution 51/L1 on Sri Lanka, which will "extend and reinforce the capacity of the Office of the High Commissioner to collect, consolidate, analyse and preserve" evidence that may be used in future war crimes trials.[202]

Families of the disappeared, and lawyers acting on their behalf, continue to face threats and harassment from the authorities and from non-state actors in their search for justice, truth, and reparation stated Amnesty International in November 2020.[203]

In September 2020, the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances made the following observations in relation to situations of particular concern in Sri Lanka:

"The Working Group is concerned by the deteriorating civil society space in Sri Lanka and emphasizes that relatives of forcibly disappeared individuals as well as others such as witnesses and defence counsels should be protected against any form of intimidation, harassment or ill-treatment, and that the Government has the duty to guarantee the right to form and participate freely in organizations and associations concerned with attempting to establish the circumstances of enforced disappearances and the fate of disappeared persons and to assist victims of enforced disappearances." [204]

The UN Working Group in September 2020 also expressed alarm that Former Army sergeant Sunil Ratnayake was granted a Presidential Pardon in March 2020 after being convicted of the murder of eight civilians including children. The Working Group stated that Sri Lanka has an obligation to hold criminally responsible perpetrators of enforced disappearances and other serious violations under international humanitarian law, as well as certain superior

---

[201] **UN Human Rights Council passes resolution mandating war crimes evidence collection on Sri Lanka.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 23 March 2021). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/un-human-rights-council-passes-resolution-mandating-war-crimes-evidence-collection-sri-lanka

[202] **UN passes resolution on collecting evidence for Sri Lankan war crimes trials.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 06 October 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/un-passes-resolution-collecting-evidence-sri-lankan-war-crimes-trials

[203] **Sri Lanka: Deliver justice, truth and reparation to families of the disappeared.** *Amnesty International* (online, 20 November 2020). https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/11/sri-lanka-deliver-justice-truth-and-reparation-to-families-of-the-disappeared/

[204] **Enforced or involuntary disappearances -Report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.** Human Rights Council, Forty-fifth session, 14 September–2 October 2020. page 22.
https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/45/13

officers and to impose sanctions that are appropriate and proportionate to the crime committed.[205]

According to Sri Lankan human rights group Inform, on 30 September 2020, Mariasuresh Easwary, the head of the Mullaitivu Missing Persons' Association, was threatened by two military officials regarding a protest she had planned for Children's Day.[206]

Tamil activists have been *"abducted, tortured and raped because of their involvement in the search for the truth about the disappeared in Sri Lanka"* stated the International Truth and Justice Project in August 2020.[207]

The Presidential Secretariat stated in January 2020 that after necessary investigations, steps would be taken to issue a death certificate and the necessary support for families of the disappeared to rebuild their lives.[208] In May 2020, the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances recommended that Sri Lanka take appropriate steps regarding the legal situation of disappeared persons whose fate has not been clarified, including legal frameworks for their relatives in fields such as social welfare, financial matters, family law and property rights.[209] Without a death certificate, some families of the disappeared have struggled to access support.

The Gotabaya Rajapaksa Government ceased issuing interim relief payments to families of the disappeared, causing them further financial distress stated Amnesty International in November 2020. The Government stated that it would review the Act establishing the Office on Missing Persons, fearing that that the work of the Office on Missing Persons would enable war crime charges to be brought against the Sri Lankan military.[210]

Mass Graves and Failed Exhumations

In June 2023 a joint report, 'Mass Graves and Failed Exhumations', detailed a pattern of systematic failures by Sri Lanka to exhume and investigate mass graves across the island. The report authored by Journalists for Democracy in Sri

---

[205] **Mandates of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.** 11 May 2020. https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownLoadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=25117

[206] **Repression of Dissent: September 2020.** https://www.inform.lk/repression-of-dissent-september-2020/

[207] **Press Release: Raped and Tortured for Collecting the Names of the Disappeared.** *ITJP* (online, 30 August 2020). https://itjpsl.com/assets/press/ENGLISH-ITJP-Press-release-Disappearance.pdf

[208] **Death Certificates for Missing after Investigations.** Presidential Secretariat Press Release. January 2020. https://www.presidentsoffice.gov.lk/index.php/2020/01/24/death-certificates-for-missing-after-investigations/

[209] **Mandates of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.** 11 May 2020. https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownLoadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=25117

[210] **Sri Lanka: Commit funds to support transitional justice process for victims of conflict.** *Amnesty International* (online, 6 November 2020). https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/11/sri-lanka-commit-funds-to-support-transitional-justice-process-for-victims-of-conflict/

Lanka, the International Truth and Justice Project, Centre for Human Rights and Development and the Families of the Disappeared, highlights how successive Sri Lankan governments have interfered in investigations into mass graves between 1989 and 2009. The report highlights that while tens of thousands of bodies lie undiscovered in mass graves across the island, only 20 mass graves have been partially exhumed over the last 30 years. [211]

In late June 2023 a mass grave was discovered at Kokkuthoduvai in Northern Province. Families of the disappeared, Tamil civil society, and political leaders called for the inclusion of international expertise due to doubts about the Sri Lankan state's capacity to handle such matters effectively, given their past failed investigations into mass grave sites. There are deepening concerns about the political will of the state to conduct an impartial investigation without interference from various state entities. [212]

In June 2025, 19 human skeletal remains — including three infants — were discovered at the Chemmani burial site on the outskirts of Jaffna Northern Province. It is the site of mass graves, where potentially, hundreds of Tamils who were murdered by the Sri Lankan military lie buried. The exhumation has reignited calls for international forensic involvement and intensified scrutiny. Tamil civil society groups fear a repeat of previous mass grave investigations that yielded no accountability. [213] [214]

In September 2025, the second phase of excavations at the Chemmani–Sindhubathi mass grave in Jaffna concluded, revealing at least 240 human skeletons, including the remains of children, infants, and bodies found in overlapping positions, in one of the island's largest ever mass graves. [215]

The situation for Tamils

The majority of Sri Lankan Tamils live in the Northern Province and Eastern Province of Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan security forces have a long history of brute force against the Tamil population on the island. The North-East remains heavily militarized, with army personnel regularly intimidating and harassing locals.

---

[211] **Mass Graves and Failed Exhumations in Sri Lanka. June 2023.** https://itjpsl.com/assets/ITJP_MassGraves_report_v5.1.pdf

[212] **Former Provincial Councillor raises concerns over Kokkuthoduvai mass grave investigation.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 07 September 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/former-provincial-councillor-raises-concerns-over-kokkuthoduvai-mass-grave-investigation

[213] **Tamil protesters chase Sri Lankan minister from Chemmani protest site.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, June 25, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/breaking-tamil-protesters-chase-sri-lankan-minister-chemmani-protest-site

[214] **Explainer - What are the Chemmani mass graves?** *Tamil Guardian* (online, June 25, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/explainer-what-are-chemmani-mass-graves

[215] **Skeleton with shattered skull among 240 bodies uncovered at Chemmani mass grave.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, September 10, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/bound-skeleton-shattered-skull-among-240-bodies-uncovered-chemmani-mass-grave

While the tightening of civil liberties by the Rajapaksa government negatively impacted a wide range of minority groups within Sri Lanka, the risk posed to the Tamil community was especially acute. This risk continued under the Wickremesinghe government. Ranil Wickremesinghe too had a history of discrimination and militarisation against the Tamils. Like Rajapaksa, Wickremesinghe had close ties to the military.[216]

In September 2024, Anura Kumara Dissanayake was elected as President of Sri Lanka. Dissanayake immediately appointed accused war criminal Sampath Thuyacontha as the new Secretary of Defence. During his presidential campaign, Dissanayake said he "will not seek to punish anyone accused of rights violations and war crimes". [217]

In June 2025, five international human rights organisations expressed deep concern over Sri Lanka's continued failure to deliver justice for victims of war crimes, enforced disappearances, and systemic abuses. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the International Commission of Jurists, the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development, and the Sri Lanka Campaign for Peace and Justice, in a letter to Volker Turk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, stated that while the government under Sri Lankan president Anura Kumara Dissanayake had made promises prior to elections, it had shown little political will to implement meaningful reforms since coming to power, instead retaining many of the policies of its predecessors. The letter stated:

"Patterns of violations and abuses, previously highlighted in your reports, have continued since last year's [2024] elections. Civil society, victims and survivors who engage with the UNHRC process continue to face harassment and intimidation at the hands of state agents." [218]

In June 2025, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights visited Sri Lanka. At the conclusion of his visit, he stated that in his discussions with a wide range of actors, including members of civil society and victims of human rights abuses, he had heard that *"the same old patterns of surveillance of human right defenders persists."* [219]

---

[216] **Sri Lanka's crisis is not just about the economy, but a long history of discrimination against minority groups.** *The Conversation* (online, 14 July 2022). https://theconversation.com/sri-lankas-crisis-is-not-just-about-the-economy-but-a-long-history-of-discrimination-against-minority-groups-186747?mc_cid=659d49641a&mc_eid=81f597ba1d

[217] **Newly elected Sri Lankan president discusses 'defence priorities' with security forces commanders.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 23 September 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/newly-elected-sri-lankan-president-discusses-defence-priorities-security-forces-commanders

[218] **Joint Letter to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.** *Human Rights Watch* (online, June 17, 2025). https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/06/17/joint-letter-to-the-un-high-commissioner-for-human-rights

[219] **Türk ends mission to Sri Lanka.** *OHCHR* (online, 26 June 2025). https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2025/06/turk-ends-mission-sri-lanka

In March 2025, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) called on the Sri Lankan government to take action against the ongoing intimidation of Tamil civil society actors, journalists, and activists in the North-East, as well as deliver justice for rights violations and holding perpetrators accountable. Despite the political transition to the Dissanayake Government, the OHCHR confirmed that reports of surveillance and intimidation by Sri Lankan security forces in the Tamil homeland continue to emerge.

"Our Office continues to receive reports of surveillance and intimidation by security agencies in the North and East, highlighting the need for more fundamental security sector reforms,"

stated Maarit Kohonen Sheriff, Director of OHCHR's Global Operations Division in her oral update to the UN Human Rights Council on reconciliation and accountability in Sri Lanka. [220]

In August 2024, the Comprehensive Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Situation in Sri Lanka, stated:

"Lack of accountability for past and present human rights violations at all levels remains a fundamental human rights problem in Sri Lanka, particularly in cases where alleged perpetrators are members of security forces. "

"Failure of the Sri Lankan State to specifically recognize victims' suffering, to acknowledge the military and other security forces' role in the commission of gross human rights violations, and to address violations committed in the past and present, has been a key obstacle to the rule of law, democracy, and good governance. Many of the structures and some of the members of the State apparatus credibly implicated in the grave crimes and human rights violations remain in place, preventing meaningful progress in terms of accountability and perpetuating human rights violations." [221]

In March 2024, Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated in an Oral Update at the 55th Session of the Human Rights Council that:

"*Violations of human rights remain unaddressed."*

"My *Office continues to receive allegations of surveillance, harassment and arrests by security forces of civil society representatives, journalists and victims, as well as of people who have been involved in organising commemoration events for war victims."*

"I remain deeply concerned about recurring, credible accounts received by my Office of abductions, unlawful detention and torture, including sexual violence, by

[220] **UN calls on Sri Lanka to end intimidation in North-East and deliver justice**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, 03 March 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/un-calls-sri-lanka-end-intimidation-and-deliver-justice

[221] **A/HRC/57/19: Situation of human rights in Sri Lanka - Comprehensive report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights - Advance unedited version. Published 22 August 2024. [paragraphs 44 & 63]** https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/ahrc5719-situation-human-rights-sri-lanka-comprehensive-report-united-nations

the Sri Lankan police and security forces, some of which allegedly took place in 2023, mainly in the north and east of the country." [222]

In June 2024, Human Rights Watch reported in a Briefing Note on Human Rights in Sri Lanka that 'restrictions on civic space, which are most intense in the north and east, have continued and perhaps intensified under the presidency of Ranil Wickremesinghe. Tamil activists and victims, including the mothers of the disappeared, are routinely subject to surveillance and harassment.' [223]

The 2023 Report on Sri Lanka by the UN Human Rights Committee noted that that there were ongoing reports of arbitrary arrests and detention of anti-government protestors, trade unionists, Tamils and Muslims. Allegations of systematic torture and sexual violence by government authorities against ethnic Tamil detainees remained unaddressed. [224] [225]
[The UN Human Rights Committee is the body of 18 independent experts that monitors implementation of the International Covenant on Civil & Political Rights by its State parties.]

In September 2023, a written update of the High Commissioner was presented to the 54th session of the UN Human Rights Council on the situation of human rights in Sri Lanka. The report stated that 'one year after the remarkable protest movement demanding deep political and democratic reforms, the transformation that was hoped for to address long-standing challenges has still not materialised'. Delays in holding local government elections and in reconstituting Provincial Councils under the 13th amendment have limited people's right to political participation and the free expression of voters. Land acquisition in the north and east for expansion of military installations, Buddhist heritage conservation at Hindu or Muslim sites, and forestry protection have also escalated tensions. Initiatives by victims to memorialise their loved ones have been obstructed and measures restricting the right to protest prevent people from expressing their grievances and engaging in critical debate. [226]
[The UN Human Rights Council an intergovernmental body within the UN system made up of 47 States responsible for the promotion and protection of all human rights around the globe.]

---

[222] **High Commissioner presents updates on human rights in Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Cyprus and Sri Lanka. OHCHR. 01 March 2024**. https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/03/high-commissioner-presents-updates-human-rights-colombia-guatemala

[223] **Human Rights Watch Briefing Note on Human Rights in Sri Lanka. Human Rights Watch. June 21st 2024.** https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/06/21/human-rights-watch-briefing-note-human-rights-sri-lanka

[224] **UN Human Rights Committee. Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Sri Lanka. 24th March 2023.** [points 28 & 29]
https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2FC%2FLKA%2FCO%2F6&Lang=en

[225] **UN Paints Bleak Picture of Rights in Sri Lanka. Entrenched Patterns of Abuse Define Country's Current Crisis**. *Human Rights Watch* (online, 30th March 2023).
https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/30/un-paints-bleak-picture-rights-sri-lanka

[226] **Sri Lanka update. 11 September 2023. Nada Al-Nashif United Nations Deputy High Commissioner at 54th session of the Human Rights Council**. https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/09/sri-lanka-update

In June 2023, Nada Al-Nashif, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, in her oral update on promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka stated:

"The past months have unfortunately witnessed the old reflex of using draconian laws to curtail opposition and control civic space, with a heavy-handed approach to protests far too often, including the arrest of protest leaders and forceful crowd control measures, as well as the persistent use of the military in police functions.

In March 2023, the Human Rights Committee expressed deep concern about the misuse of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Act against journalists, human rights defenders and other civil society actors.

The Government has committed to replacing the Prevention of Terrorism Act with legislation that adheres to international standards, but the new "Anti-terrorism" Bill gazetted in March contained sweeping provisions that would limit freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and even labour rights. Following strong pushback from civil society, the draft bill has been recalled for additional consultations.

I encourage the Government to repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act, and in the meantime to implement fully a strict moratorium on its use, considering that the ordinary criminal code and other ancillary laws already provide adequate tools for law enforcement." [227]

In June 2022 in his report to the UN Human Rights Council, Special Rapporteur Clement Voule stated that:

"Sri Lankan police frequently appear to respond to protests that are disfavoured for political reasons by arresting their participants, in violation of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. Police have arrested peaceful protesters calling for accountability in relation to Tamil war victims; for environmental protection; for more equitable socio-economic policies; for better working conditions; and for education rights. Sri Lanka continues to engage in extremely restrictive practices relative to associations representing minority groups and viewpoints. Sri Lanka has continued surveilling, harassing and at times arresting human rights defenders, journalists, activists and critics. In light of what appears to be a pattern of surveillance, harassment and reprisals, the Special Rapporteur reiterates his call on Sri Lanka to immediately end all attacks on human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations with the utmost urgency." [228]

In March 2022 the Annual Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that:

'The pattern of surveillance and harassment of civil society organizations, human rights defenders and victims highlighted in previous reports has continued, particularly for those in the north and east of the country. OHCHR continues to receive allegations of intimidation, monitoring and surveillance by the security services of human rights defenders, civil society representatives, journalists and families of the disappeared.'

'A range of restrictions have affected the operating space for civil society organizations, particularly in the north and east of the country. Organizations report being unable to work without surveillance or scrutiny and having to inform and get approval from the district

[227] **Oral update on promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka. Statement by Nada Al-Nashif, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights. 21st June 2023.** https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2023/06/sri-lanka-promoting-reconciliation-accountability-and-rights

[228] **Follow-up to country visits to Tunisia, Armenia, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Clément Nyaletsossi Voule (A/HRC/49/9) (Advance Unedited Version). Human Rights Council Fiftieth session, 13 June–8 July 2022**. [paragraphs 37,40, 45, 48]. https://reliefweb.int/report/tunisia/follow-country-visits-tunisia-armenia-sri-lanka-and-zimbabwe-report-special-rapporteur-rights-freedom-peaceful-assembly-and-association-clement-nyaletsossi-voule-ahrc499-advance-unedited-version

secretariat for any activity. Some areas of work that do not involve material service delivery, such as psychosocial support, are particularly discouraged. Civil society organizations informed OHCHR that banks often require them to get approval from their respective district secretariat before releasing funds, placing administrative hurdles in their way.'

'The High Commissioner is concerned by the Government's recent public responses to human rights advocacy by well-known and respected civil society representatives and its conflation with propaganda by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Similar interventions in the past have had a chilling effect on Sri Lankan human rights defenders, including in their interaction with the Human Rights Council.'

'OHCHR has received a number of reports stating that victim groups continue to face harassment and intimidation from the authorities, including multiple visits from intelligence and police officers inquiring about plans for protests or commemorations, or their past links with LTTE. In addition, rehabilitated LTTE members and their families or anyone considered to have had any link to LTTE during the conflict are targets of constant surveillance. The High Commissioner is concerned about the gender dimension of these policies in a context where many of those advocating for justice are women survivors or family members and face additional vulnerability in their dealings with the security forces and the authorities' [229]

In January 2021, in her Report to the UN Council for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights stated,

"Sri Lanka's current trajectory sets the scene for the recurrence of the policies and practices that gave rise to grave human rights violations." [230]

Banning of public commemorations for Tamils killed during the civil war:

State-led suppression of commemorative events can be an indicator for the authoritarian abuse of history warned the co-editor of the Network of Concerned Historians. [231]

In November 2020, the Rajapaksa government banned all public commemorations for Tamils killed during the civil war. Great Hero's Day (Maaveerar Naal) celebrations were forbidden.[232] Private commemorations were still permitted, however according to media reports, security forces blocked access to the thuyilum illams – the resting places of those killed during the war – as well as raiding private homes and making arrests. [233] The thuyilum illams

[229] **A/HRC/49/9: Situation of human rights in Sri Lanka – Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. 28 February–1 April 2022.** [pages 6-7, paragraphs 27 -30, 32] https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session49/Pages/ListReports.aspx

[230] **Promotion reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka. Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Advance unedited version. Distr.: General. 27 January 2021** (page14, point 52).
https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/LK/Sri_LankaReportJan2021.docx

[231] Ruben Zeeman. **Suppression of Public Commemoration is an Early Warning of Authoritarian Abuse of History.** *History News Network* (online, 26th February 2023)
https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/185105

[232] **Sri Lanka bans remembrance of dead Tamil rebels.** *TRT World* (online, 27 November 2020)
https://www.trtworld.com/asia/sri-lanka-bans-remembrance-of-dead-tamil-rebels-41851

[233] **Tamil nation marks Maaveerar Naal 2020.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 27 November 2020)
https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamil-nation-marks-maaveerar-naal-2020

were destroyed by government forces following the war but many of these have been restored by Tamil communities.[234]

The culture of impunity is so deeply embedded within institutions of the Sri Lankan Police and Sri Lankan Army that, under the Wickremesinghe Government, police and army continued to suppress Tamil people's memorial commemorations according to international human rights and United Nations reports. [235] [236]

Under the Anura Dissanayake government, state policies aimed at curbing Tamil expressions of grief and remembrance have continued.

In May 2025, a Tamil social activist from Batticaloa was brutally assaulted by unidentified assailants who questioned him about a planned Mullivaikkal remembrance commemoration. The attack occured on the road between the Dharavai army camp and the Fifth Mile Post army checkpoint, a corridor well-known for its dense military presence. The targeting in this location of a Tamil activist involved in genocide remembrance has raised fears of state-linked intimidation. [237]

Restrictions, intense surveillance, intimidation and interrogation by Sri Lankan police hampered November 2024 Maveerar Naal memorial commemorations in the Northern and Eastern provinces. [238]

In May 2024, four Tamils were arrested in Trincomalee, Eastern Province, for preparing and distributing kanji (boiled rice porridge) as a form of remembering Tamils killed during the Civil War at Mullivaikkal fifteen years ago. Sri Lankan police officers also obstructed Tamils in Batticaloa from distributing kanji during Tamil Genocide Remembrance Week. [239]

In November 2023, Sri Lankan authorities increased acts of intimidation towards Tamils as they prepared to mark Maaveerar Naal. Sri Lanka's Inspector General

---

[234] **Kilinochchi residents clear up destroyed Mulankavil LTTE cemetery.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 25 October 2017) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/kilinochchi-residents-clear-destroyed-mulankavil-ltte-cemetery

[235] **Sri Lanka: Impunity Continues in the Country Amidst Multiple Crises.** Human Rights Watch. HRW Oral Statement - Item 6 Universal Periodic y 12th Review Outcome - HRC53. July 12th, 2023. https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/07/12/sri-lanka-impunity-continues-country-amidst-multiple-crises

[236] **Situation of human rights in Sri Lanka. Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Human Rights Council. Fifty-fourth session 11 September–6 October 2023. [paragraphs 33 & 61].** https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/09/accountability-central-sri-lankas-future-un-human-rights-report

[237] **Tamil activist assaulted ahead of Mullivaikkal commemoration.** *Tamil Guardian* (online 14 May, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/index.php/content/activist-beaten-unidentified-men-amid-mullivaikkal-porridge-event

[238] **No flags, no flowers - Sri Lankan police summon volunteers ahead of Maaveerar Naal.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 22 November 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/no-flags-no-flowers-sri-lankan-police-summon-volunteers-ahead-maaveerar-naal

[239] **Four Tamils released on bail following arrest for distributing kanji in Trincomalee.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 17 May 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/four-tamils-released-bail-following-arrest-distributing-kanji-trincomalee

of Police (IGP) and the Director of the Terrorist Investigation Division (TID) pledged to take legal action against those who attempted to mark Maaveerar Naal stating that any individuals who marked the day would be investigated under the Criminal Procedure Code.[240] Riot police armed with shields and batons were sent to shut down a memorial event in Batticaloa, whilst in other parts of Eelam, Tamils were blocked from commemorating their heroes. Regardless, events took place at every district across Tamil Eelam.[241] At least 11 Tamils were arrested by Sri Lankan authorities under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). This included an18-year old schoolboy for helping with sound equipment. Several others were detained for various reasons, including carrying red and yellow flags and hiring out vehicles or power generators, and a bakery employee for selling a cake. The arrests sparked international concern, with statements from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the US, the UK, the EU and Canada all condemning the detentions.[242]

Meenakshi Ganguly, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch commented:

"The Sri Lankan authorities' use of a counterterrorism law against Tamils commemorating those who died in the civil war is cruelly abusive and further marginalizes a community that already faces persistent government discrimination. President Ranil Wickremesinghe speaks of 'reconciliation,' but his government's actions only serve to deepen ethnic divisions."[243]

In September 2023, a memorial float commemorating Thileepan, a prominent LTTE activist from the north, was attacked by a Sinhala mob as it travelled from Eastern Province to Northern Province. Tamil National Peoples' Front MP Selvarajah Kajendren was injured in the attack despite the presence of Sri Lankan police officers who silently looked on.[244] Following this, multiple Police departments reported the incident to various courts requesting a ban on the commemoration anticipating that other commemorative events would take place within their jurisdictions. A special team dispatched by the Attorney General's office in Colombo filed another submission at the Jaffna Magistrate, claiming that commemorative events disrupt racial harmony.[245]

---

[240] **Sri Lanka's TID head and police chief vow to punish Maaveerar Naal commemorations.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 26 November 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-s-tid-head-and-police-chief-vow-punish-maaveerar-naal-commemorations

[241] **Tamils defy Sri Lankan crackdown to remember their heroes - Maaveerar Naal 2023.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 27 November 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamils-defy-sri-lankan-crackdown-remember-their-heroes-maaveerar-naal-2023

[242] **Schoolboy and baker amongst those arrested by Sri Lanka, as more Tamils detained under PTA.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 02 December 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/schoolboy-and-baker-amongst-those-arrested-sri-lanka-more-tamils-detained-under-pta

[243] **Sri Lanka: Tamils Detained for Commemorating War Dead.** *Human Right Watch* (online, 6 December 2023). https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/06/sri-lanka-tamils-detained-commemorating-war-dead

[244] **Canada slams Sri Lanka over assault on Tamil MP.** *Colombo Gazette* (online, September 18, 2023). https://colombogazette.com/2023/09/18/canada-slams-sri-lanka-over-assault-on-tamil-mp/

[245] **Sri Lankan government continues to attempt to ban commemoration events of Thileepan.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 25 September 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-government-continues-attempt-ban-commemoration-events-thileepan

In May 2023, a Tamil man was arrested by police for having a banner which read "Tamil Genocide Memorial Day" at a commemoration event in Naripulthottam, Batticaloa, Eastern Province.[246] In May 2023 Trincomalee Magistrate court issued an order prohibiting 13 people from holding an event to mark Tamil Genocide Day. [247]

In November 2022, the Sri Lankan army, who continue to be stationed across the Tamil homeland, increased acts of intimidation towards Tamils as they prepared to mark Maaveerar Naal. The Sri Lankan military established more checkpoints in the already heavily militarised North-East, noting vehicle registration numbers and passenger details.[248] Tamils were harassed and photographed by the military as they cleaned Thuyilum Illams.[249] Tamil youth in Mullaitivu participating in a blood donation drive to mark the fifth day of Maaveerar remembrance week were photographed and questioned by Sri Lanka's Criminal Investigation Department. Sri Lankan police officers interrogated Tamils wearing a badge embroidered with the karthigai poo - the national flower of Tamil Eelam.[250] Traders and their families were investigated by Sri Lankan intelligence officers after decorating their shop fronts with red and yellow flags in the lead up to Maaveerar Naal. [251] Mullaitivu police threatened to shoot Tamils after tearing down red and yellow flags hoisted for Maaveeral Naal commemorations. Police also threatened to arrest Tamils at Mullaitivu beach who were broadcasting songs that paid tribute to the tens of thousands of Tamil fighters who sacrificed their lives.[252]

On May 18th, 2022, on the 13th anniversary of the massacre at Mullivaikkal which killed tens of thousands of Tamil civilians, the Sri Lankan military announced that 396 Officers & 8,110 other ranks in the army had been promoted. The promotions were approved by the head of Sri Lanka's army

---

[246] **Sri Lankan police arrest Tamil man over 'Tamil Genocide Memorial Day' banner.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 17th May 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-police-arrest-tamil-man-over-tamil-genocide-memorial-day-banner

[247] **Trincomalee Magistrate court prohibits 13 people from organising Tamil Genocide Day commemoration event.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 18 May 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/trincomalee-magistrate-court-prohibits-13-people-organising-tamil-genocide-day-commemoration

[248] **Sri Lankan military set up checkpoints as Maaveerar remembrance week begins.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 21 November 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-military-set-checkpoints-maaveerar-remembrance-week-begins

[249] **Mullaitivu Tamils prepare for Maaveerar Naal amidst military intimidation.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 17 November 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/mullaitivu-tamils-prepare-maaveerar-naal-amidst-military-intimidation

[250] **Mullaitivu youth face CID intimidation at blood donation drive.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 25 November 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/mullaitivu-youth-face-cid-intimidation-blood-donation-drive

[251] **Traders in Mullaitivu investigated over red and yellow flags on shop fronts.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 26 November 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/traders-mullaitivu-investigated-over-red-and-yellow-flags-shop-fronts

[252] **BREAKING - Mullaitivu police threaten to shoot Tamils over Maaveerar Naal commemorations.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 27 November 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/breaking-mullaitivu-police-threaten-shoot-tamils-over-maaveerar-naal-commemorations

Shavendra Silva and Sri Lankan president Gotabaya Rajapaksa, both of whom are credibly accused of war crimes.[253]

In May 2022 a Tamil man Vivekanandan Piriyangan was hospitalised after being brutally assaulted by thugs with close ties to Sri Lankan military intelligence for organising a Tamil Genocide Remembrance Day commemoration event in Mullivaikkal earlier that week. [254]

In November 2021, over 50 restraining orders against Tamil politicians and grassroot activists, were issued by judicial courts to prevent them from participating in Maaveerar Naal events. [255]

On May 18th, 2021, on the 12th anniversary of the massacre at Mullivaikkal, Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa promoted 452 officers in the Sri Lankan army and 4289 officials of other ranks.[256] Heavily armed troops patrolled Tamil areas and intimidated Tamils from remembering their war dead. Sri Lankan security forces arrested ten Tamil men and women after the group held a memorial event at a beach in Batticaloa to mark Tamil Genocide Day. They were charged under the draconian anti-terror law, the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). The PTA allows arbitrary and indefinite imprisonment of people.[257] The ten Tamils were detained for 7 months. They were released on bail in December 2021 and in April 2022 all charges against them were dropped.[258] [259]

[253] **Hundreds of Sri Lankan army officers promoted as Tamil nation mourns massacre at Mullivaikkal.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 18 May 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/hundreds-sri-lankan-army-officers-promoted-tamil-nation-mourns-massacre-mullivaikkal

[254] **Tamil man hospitalised following assault by Sri Lankan military aligned thugs over Mullivaikkal commemoration.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 22 May 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamil-man-hospitalised-following-assault-sri-lankan-military-aligned-thugs-over-mullivaikkal

[255] **Sri Lanka launches offensive against Tamils preparing to mourn war dead.** *Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka* (online, 18th November 2021). http://www.jdslanka.org/index.php/news-features/politics-a-current-affairs/1057-sri-lanka-launches-offensive-against-tamils-preparing-to-mourn-war-dead

[256] **Sri Lanka's military promotes 452 officers during Tamil Genocide Day.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 21 May 2021). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-s-military-promotes-452-officers-during-tamil-genocide-day

[257] **Sri Lanka Charges Tamils who Remembered their War Dead under Draconian Anti-Terror Law.** *Tamil News Service* (online, 19 May2021). https://www.einnews.com/pr_news/541565310/sri-lanka-charges-tamils-who-remembered-their-war-dead-under-draconian-anti-terror-law

[258] **Ten Tamils detained for 7 months for commemorating Mullivaikkal genocide released on bail.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 8 December 2021). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/ten-tamils-detained-7-months-commemorating-mullivaikkal-genocide-released-bail

[259] **Tamils arrested, detained and now finally released for lighting candles.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 26 April 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamils-arrested-detained-and-now-finally-released-lighting-candles

Arbitrary Administrative Detention:

In its April 2023 Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Sri Lanka the UN Human Rights Committee reported that:

The Committee is concerned by reports of arbitrary arrests and detention of anti-government protestors, trade unionists, Tamils and Muslims, including Muslim women for wearing a niqab. It is also concerned that arrested or detained persons do not always enjoy all the fundamental legal safeguards from the very outset of their detention, including the rights to have prompt access to a lawyer, to have access to a doctor of their own choice and to be brought promptly before a judge. It is further concerned about the extensive use of prolonged pretrial detention, inconsistent bail provisions, ineffective access to non-custodial alternatives and the failure of the authorities to take into account the length of pretrial detention when determining the final sentence (arts. 9 and 14). [260]

The Committee is deeply concerned about the widespread practice of torture and ill-treatment by police and security forces in places of detention, which has resulted in deaths in custody, in particular against those arrested and detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. It is concerned that confessions obtained under torture have been admitted as evidence in courts and that magistrates have the competence but not the obligation to move a detainee who reports torture or ill-treatment to a safe location. It regrets the lack of requested information on the number of allegations of torture and ill-treatment made during the reporting period, and the outcomes thereof (arts. 2 and 7). [261]

In June 2021, Michelle Bachelet, United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights at the opening of the UN Human Rights Council's 47th session in Geneva, stated:

"In Sri Lanka, I am concerned by further Government measures perceived as targeting Muslims, and by the harassment of Tamils, including in the context of commemoration events for those who died at the end of the war." [262]

She further said that regulations now permit the arbitrary administrative detention of people for up to two years, without trial for the purposes of de-radicalisation. *"I also note a continuing series of deaths in police custody and in the context of police encounters with alleged criminal gangs."* [263]

In August 2021, a team of UN Special Rapporteurs published a report expressing serious concern about the adoption and implementation of a recent Regulation by the Sri Lankan Government, titled 'Prevention of Terrorism (De-radicalization from holding violent extremist religious ideology). The provisions in the

---

[260] **UN Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Sri Lanka, 26 April 2023, para. 26 & 28.** https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2FC%2FLKA%2FCO%2F6&Lang=en

[261] **UN Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Sri Lanka, 26 April 2023, para. 26 & 28.** https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2FC%2FLKA%2FCO%2F6&Lang=en

[262] **UN rights chief voices concern over Sri Lanka's counter-terrorism laws.** *Adaderana.lk* (online, 21 June 2021) http://www.adaderana.lk/news/74822/un-rights-chief-voices-concern-over-sri-lankas-counter-terrorism-laws

[263] **UN rights chief voices concern over Sri Lanka's counter-terrorism laws.** *Adaderana.lk* (online, 21 June 2021) http://www.adaderana.lk/news/74822/un-rights-chief-voices-concern-over-sri-lankas-counter-terrorism-laws

Regulation are contrary to Sri Lanka's international legal obligations. The current legislation *"risks jeopardizing the rights and liberties of persons who may be detained arbitrarily, especially religious and ethnic minorities, and may curtail political dissent".* The UN experts highlighted that a criminal act need not be committed by the individual as authorities are granted the power to detain and deprive them of their liberty simply *"on the basis of suspicion and without judicial process".* The Report states "*the possibility of coercion, torture, or risk of enforced disappearance during the 24-hour unsupervised detention period, gives rise to considerable concerns"*. The UN Special Rapporteurs have called upon the Sri Lankan Government to rescind the Regulation. The new Regulation expands upon previous concerns raised by the UN that remain unaddressed and are an additional set of rights- denying measures further undermining the protection of human rights in Sri Lanka. [264] [265] [See also the chapter on the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) on pages 98- 104 of this report.]

Increased use of the military

Adayaalam Centre for Policy Research in their latest February 2025 report stated:
During the final phase of the armed conflict, many people who lived in the Eastern province were internally displaced to LTTE-controlled areas. At the end of the war, they attempted to return to their lands in the East, but their return was conditional on expectations of reporting to the State. The military has files on most of these returnees, some of them ex-LTTE combatants, and forces these returnees to report to them whenever they intend to leave their local areas, Whenever the local military garrison commander changes, the new commander will review all the files and re-check all the returnees to ensure they remain in their specific areas. The result of this is not only surveillance, but also a stigma within the community.[266]

After the election of President Rajapaksa there was increased use of the military and the militarisation of responses to issues such as the COVID 19 pandemic. *"Sri Lanka's involvement of the military at every level, with limited parliamentary and civilian oversight, raises serious human rights and rule of law concerns,"* stated Boram Jang, Legal Advisor at the International Commission of Jurists Asia & the Pacific Programme. *"Having the military to oversee the public health policy and to act as the State's first responders also normalises military occupation, exacerbates the existing ethnic divides, and further deteriorates human rights in Sri Lanka"* stated Jang.[267]

---

[264] **UN Special Rapporteurs Communication Report to Sri Lankan Government. 9th August 2021.** https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownLoadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=26575

[265] **Sri Lanka's expanded PTA violates basic liberties warn UN experts.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 16 August 2021) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankas-expanded-pta-violates-basic-liberties-warn-un-experts

[266] **A Phantom that is Real -Persisting Culture of Surveillance and Intimidation in the North-East.** [pages 17-18]. Adayaalam Centre for Policy Research. February 2025. https://adayaalam.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/A-Phantom-that-is-Real_-Persisting-Culture-or-Surveilance-and-Intimidation-in-the-NorthEast.pdf

[267] **Sri Lanka's militarised COVID-19 response 'exacerbates ethnic divides'.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 29 October 2020). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-s-militarised-covid-19-response-exacerbates-ethnic-divides

The Wickremesinghe Government continued to increase military presence in the Northern and Eastern provinces.

The UN Human Rights Committee in its March 2023 Report on Sri Lanka, expressed its "concern about the continued expansion and increase of military zones, security-related infrastructure and military-owned businesses in the Northern and Eastern provinces, despite the State party's commitment to reducing the military presence in those provinces." [268]

In November 2021, the Sri Lankan army reportedly set up a new camp in Batticaloa district in Eastern Province. This move from the Sri Lanka's army was the latest in its rampant militarisation of the Tamil homeland in the North-East.[269]

In March 2021 President Gotabaya Rajapaksa announced that security would be increased in the Eastern Province which has significant Tamil and Muslim populations, with the reopening of 50 military and STF camps, to stem separatist terrorism and Islamic extremism. This announcement followed the closing of 1,000 Islamic schools and the banning of the Burka on the grounds of 'national security.'[270]

In December 2020, the then Minister of Public Security, Sarath Weerasekara increased surveillance in the Eastern Province, and reiterated his calls for the Tamil National Alliance to be banned:

"We have deployed our intelligence people and informed the Security Forces in the area. We have increased our mobile patrols and planted certain informants there and they will give us all information required." [271]

Abductions, Killings and Death Threats

In July 2025, former Eastern Province Provincial Councillor, K. Pushpakumar (also known as Iniyabharathi) and a follower were arrested by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) after a lengthy investigation by the CID into a series of organized crimes. This included extortion, kidnapping, murder, enforced disappearances, use of firearms and the operation of torture chambers

[268] **UN Human Rights Committee. Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Sri Lanka. 24th March 2023.** [point 34] https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2FC%2FLKA%2FCO%2F6&Lang=en

[269] **Sri Lankan army sets new camp up in Batticaloa bird sanctuary.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 5 November 2021. https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-army-sets-new-camp-batticaloa-bird-sanctuary

[270] **Rajapaksa to reopen military and STF camps in the Eastern Province as militarisation intensifies.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 17 March 2021). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/rajapaksa-reopen-military-and-stf-camps-eastern-province-militarisation-intensifies

[271] **Sri Lanka's security minister boasts intelligence is 'back on track'.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 6 December 2020) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-s-security-minister-boasts-intelligence-back-track

in the Eastern Province between 2005 and 2008. Iniyabharathi had served as the head of an armed camp in Thirukkovil area of Eastern Province under the Karuna Faction. He was a Provincial Councillor in the Eastern Province from 2012 to 2015 and is currently the Ampara District organizer of the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP) party led by his closest political ally Pillayan, a former Member of Parliament and ex-Chief Minister of the Eastern Province, who is also currently in remand custody. [272] [273] [274]

In May 2024, the International Truth and Justice Project released a report titled: 'Disappearance, Torture and Sexual violence of Tamils, 2015-2022', citing details of 123 Tamils who said they were beaten, burnt, suffocated and sexually assaulted by Sri Lankan authorities between 2015-2022. 11 of them were allegedly detained after Ranil Wickremesinghe took over as Sri Lanka's president in July 2022. The report shows that many of the same methods of disappearance and torture conducted against the surrendering LTTE fighters and the Tamil civilian population by security forces in the years immediately after the end of the war remain common to this day.[275]

In March 2024, Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated in an Oral Update at the 55th Session of the Human Rights Council:

"I remain deeply concerned about recurring, credible accounts received by my Office of abductions, unlawful detention and torture, including sexual violence, by the Sri Lankan police and security forces, some of which allegedly took place in 2023, mainly in the north and east of the country." [276]

In January 2024, the Sri Lankan Bar Association (BASL) raised concerns over the escalating incidents of police brutality resulting in killings by the police, and called for an 'independent inquiry' into the matter. [277]

In November 2023, 25-year-old Tamil man Nagarasa Alex was declared dead just hours after he described on video how the Sri Lankan police were brutally torturing him. He had been detained by the Sri Lankan police in Vaddukkottai.

---

[272] **Pillayan's closest ally Iniyabharathi arrested over multiple crimes.** *Lankasara* (online, 6 July 2025). https://lankasara.com/news/pillayans-closest-ally-iniyabharathi-arrested/

[273] **Former EP Councillor Iniya Bharathi arrested.** *Ceylon Today* (online, 6 July 2025). https://ceylontoday.lk/2025/07/07/former-ep-councillor-iniya-bharathi-arrested/

[274] **Pillayan's associate "Iniya Bharathi" arrested**. *Newswire* (online 6 July 2025). https://www.newswire.lk/2025/07/06/pillayans-associate-iniya-bharathi-arrested/

[275] **Disappearances, Torture and Sexual Violence Continue After War's End. ITJP. May 2024.** https://groundviews.org/2024/05/09/disappearances-torture-and-sexual-violence-continue-after-wars-end/

[276] **High Commissioner presents updates on human rights in Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Cyprus and Sri Lanka. OHCHR. 01 March 2024.** https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/03/high-commissioner-presents-updates-human-rights-colombia-guatemala

[277] **Sri Lankan Bar Association calls for 'independent inquiry' into police killings**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, 24 January 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-bar-association-calls-independent-inquiry-police-killings

In the video, Alex described being waterboarded, having ropes tied to his elbows and hung, having his head covered with a bag filled with petrol, and forced to drink alcohol. The video has been widely shared, with anger brewing over the killing of another Tamil youth. [278]

In December 2023, human rights defender Jeewaratnam Suresh received a threatening phone call from an unidentified number warning him to stop his advocacy or face dire consequences. The threats were linked to a fundamental rights petition filed by the human rights defender in March 2023 seeking improvements in housing rights for the persecuted Malayaga Tamil community.[279]

In October 2023, masked gunmen threatened Tamil activist Lavakumar in Batticaloa District Eastern Province, warning "We will definitely kill you" if he continued to expose details of an alleged secret military-run torture site in the East. The incident occurred after Lavakumar spoke out against a secret torture site in Theevuchchenai on the border with Polonnaruwa. The camp is allegedly run by Pillaiyan, alias Sivanesathurai Chandrakanthan, a government-linked paramilitary leader.

"I am pretty certain that none other than state intelligence units and paramilitaries affiliated to the government are able to carry out such acts," Lavakumar told Tamil Guardian reporters. [280]

In August 2022, Mangala Maddumage, a national organiser of the Revolutionary Students Union was reportedly abducted by unidentified men in Colombo, as the crackdown on anti-government protesters continued across the South. According to Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka (JDS), Sri Lankan police confirmed that Maddumage was being held at Colombo Crime Division in Bamabalapitiya. [281]

In February 2022, Sri Lankan intelligence officers attempted to kidnap Tamil activist Nithanshan, in a white van. Nithanshan, the assistant secretary of the Illankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK) youth wing in Kalmunai, along with the MP for Ampara were arranging the signature campaign in Ampara to repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). [282]

---

[278] **'They beat me whilst I was hanging there'.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 20 November 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/they-beat-me-whilst-i-was-hanging-there

[279] **Sri Lanka: Threats And Intimidation Against Human Rights Defender Jeewaratnam Suresh.** *Front Line Defenders* (online, 21/12/23). https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/sri-lanka-threats-and-intimidation-against-human-rights-defender-jeewaratnam-suresh

[280] **'We will definitely kill you' - Armed men issue death threat to Tamil activist in Batticaloa.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 30 October 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/we-will-definitely-kill-you-armed-men-issue-death-threat-tamil-activist-batticaloa

[281] **Another activist abducted as crackdown continues in the South**. (online, 8 August 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/another-activist-abducted-crackdown-continues-south

[282] **Sri Lankan intelligence 'attempts to kidnap' Tamil political activist.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 17 February 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-intelligence-attempts-kidnap-tamil-political-activist

In February 2022, Sinhala journalist's Chamuditha Samaraweickrame' residence was attacked by an armed group who came in a white van.
In February 2022, justice activist Shehan Malaka Gamage was arrested by a group who came in a white van. [283]

Abductions and kidnappings in Sri Lanka went from 800 in 2021 to 3596 within the first 11 months of 2022 according to the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime. [284]

In August 2021 a Tamil man, who had been studying in Edinburgh went to Sri Lanka after his father fell ill. Whilst there, he was grabbed from the street and put into a white van and taken away.

"I did not believe I would survive after I was abducted off the street and taken blindfolded to a torture centre where I was beaten and abused day after day," the man continued, telling of how he was branded with lit cigarettes and fell unconscious as his captors placed a petrol-dowsed plastic bag over his head.
"If my family had not found bribe money, I would have been killed," he said after he fled back to Scotland in September. "I can never return home." [285]

In February 2021, Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka reported that at least 16 young Tamil men from Northern Province remained missing eight months after they were taken into custody by the Terrorist Investigation Division (TID) and accused of 'trying to resurrect the Tamil Tigers'. This is the single largest group of Tamils 'disappeared' while in the custody of the TID, since President Gotabaya Rajapaksa assumed office in November 2019.[286]

In September 2021, Tamil National Alliance MP M.A. Sumanthiran questioned as to why Sri Lanka has a minister for Public Security when students & activists are being abducted by plain-clothed police in broad daylight and why the police had come in white vans to arrests the suspects. The MP said that the government was attempting to send a subtle reminder to the protesters adding that "You want to tell the country, remember we did this earlier…we have brought it back. You want to instill fear." [287]

---

[283] **Third dreaded white van incident reported within a week in Sri Lanka.** *Sri Lanka Brief* (online, 22 February 2022). https://srilankabrief.org/third-dreaded-white-van-incident-reported-within-a-week-in-sri-lanka/

[284] **The criminal cost of Sri Lanka's crisis.** *Global Initiative* (online, 05, May 2023). https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/crime-sri-lanka-ocindex/#:~:text=The%20study%20cited%2C%20for%20one,first%2011%20months%20of%202022.

[285] **Torture victim accuses Police Scotland of strengthening Sri Lankan regime**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, 31st October 2021). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/torture-victim-accuses-police-scotland-strengthening-sri-lankan-regime

[286] **Relatives unable to find group of Tamils arrested by Sri Lanka anti-terror police.** *Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka* (online, 15th February 2021). http://www.jdslanka.org/index.php/news-features/human-rights/998-relatives-unable-to-find-group-of-tamils-arrested-by-sri-lanka-anti-terror-police

[287] **Sri Lanka: Plainclothes police tried to abduct a university lecturer; Govt is bringing the abductions back to instil fear charges Sumanthiran.** *Sri Lanka Brief* (online, 06th August 2021). https://srilankabrief.org/sri-lanka-plainclothes-police-men-tried-to-abduct-a-university-lecturer-govt-is-bringing-the-abductions-back-to-instil-fear-charges-sumanthiran/

In December 2016, the Report of the UN Committee Against Torture (CAT) stated that numerous individuals suspected of having even a remote link with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had been abducted and then subjected to "brutal torture", including sexual violence and rape. "According to the information received, such practices are carried out by both military and police in unacknowledged places of detention, which have included law enforcement headquarters, army and IDP camps, and rehabilitation centres", the report stated.
The committee also expressed "concern over credible reports" of so-called "white van" abductions of Tamils that has continued since the end of the civil war. [288]

Torture and excessive use of force by police and security forces:

The Comprehensive Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Situation in Sri Lanka, released on 22nd August 2024, stated:

"Torture and ill-treatment by police and security forces remain prevalent in Sri Lanka."

"The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) informed OHCHR that it received 2,845 cases of torture and 675 complaints of degrading treatment between January 2023 and March 2024. The HRCSL reported that between January 2023 and March 2024, it received 21 cases of extrajudicial killings; 26 cases of deaths in custody, and 1,342 complaints of arbitrary arrests and detentions."

"OHCHR examined recent allegations of abduction, arbitrary detention, torture, ill-treatment and sexual violence perpetrated against individuals of Tamil ethnicity by Sri Lankan security forces. These date from the period as recently as January 2024. OHCHR interviewed eight alleged victims. A clear pattern emerged: Tamils, primarily men who had been involved in protests over disappearances, land/environmental rights or commemoration of war victims and were believed to be previously involved or linked with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), were monitored or photographed, and subsequently arrested by people who verbally identified themselves as police CID or TID personnel."

"Victims described how officers came during the evening or at night, blindfolded and gagged them and then transported them into a van to a detention facility in a location unknown to them or their families, approximately between 30 minutes to two hours away. They were interrogated for three to five days on their links with ex-LTTE cadres abroad, fundraising, individuals behind protests and any alleged attempt to 'regroup the LTTE', or to obtain 'confessions' or to elicit information on buried weapons or money."

"OHCHR assessed as credible specific accounts of security forces using various techniques of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment."

---

[288] **Sri Lanka: 'Brutal torture', abduction of Tamils continued after 2009, says UN report**. *First Post* (online, 15 December 2016). https://www.firstpost.com/world/sri-lanka-brutal-torture-abduction-of-tamils-continue-says-un-report-3157818.html

"Many of the interviewees also reported experiencing sexual torture, including rape, squeezing testicles, forced nudity, biting of breasts, either during interrogation or in the holding cell. Victims described making up information or 'confessing' simply to get the treatment to stop, or signing blank papers or documents in Sinhala, a language which majority of the victims could not read."

"Nearly all interviewees recounted that they eventually were released when a family member paid a bribe to someone in the security forces, often using an intermediary. They then fled Sri Lanka. In most cases, the victims said that security or intelligence agents visited victims' home, either searching for the victim or informing families that the victim had escaped from their custody."

"OHCHR carefully assessed the reliability and credibility of these victims, and the veracity of the information they provided. The accounts were detailed and consistent and were recorded at different times, in different countries. Several victims said that the interview with OHCHR was the first time they had spoken about their experiences, and a number of them were receiving medical and psychological care and counselling." [289]

In November 2024, Sri Lankan police officers in Jaffna assaulted several Tamil civilians, including a woman and her 2-month-old baby, in an incident that sparked outrage and demands for justice, amidst ongoing police brutality. Locals, including relatives and Tamil National People's Front (TNPF) former parliamentarian Selvarajah Kajendran, demanded to know why the men who had been assaulted had been arrested and why they had not been given immediate medical treatment.
N. Kandeepan, lawyer for the civilians said *"During the proceedings, we highlighted the unwarranted actions by the police force - those meant to uphold the law and protect the public - who instead acted beyond their authority. Despite a political change to Anura Kumara Dissanayake, the nature of these incidents has not changed. The police force's brutality and lawlessness persist."* [290]

In April 2024, the Bar Association of Sri Lanka (BASL) expressed in a statement its "utmost outrage and horror" at the brutal assault of a young man from Medawachchiya, after he was forced to have a testicle removed due to assault perpetrated by Sri Lankan police officers. "This recent incident is particularly alarming, raising the chilling spectre of a descent into a police state. The people of Sri Lanka have a fundamental right to live free from fear of violence from those entrusted with their protection," said the BASL statement. [291]

---

[289] **A/HRC/57/19: Situation of human rights in Sri Lanka - Comprehensive report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights - Advance unedited version. Published 22 August 2024.** [Paragraphs 26 -31] https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/ahrc5719-situation-human-rights-sri-lanka-comprehensive-report-united-nations

[290] **Shock and outrage in Jaffna as Sri Lankan police assault Tamil baby.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 10 November 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/shock-and-outrage-jaffna-sri-lankan-police-assault-tamil-baby

[291] **Bar Association deplores alleged police brutality in Medawachchiya**. *Adaderana News* (online, 13April, 2024). https://www.adaderana.lk/news/98614/bar-association-deplores-alleged-police-brutality-in-medawachchiya

In February 2024, the Jaffna Regional Office of the National Human Rights Commission initiated an investigation into the brutal assault of a Tamil youth by Sri Lankan officers. [292] In a separate incident a week later, a Tamil university student was detained and tortured by Sri Lankan police in Jaffna. Karunakaran Nithersen said that he was tied upside down inside a secret chamber of the occupying Vaddukoddai police station and beaten mercilessly. Nitherson has since filed a case at the Human Rights Commission over fears for his life. [293]

These incidents follow a disturbing pattern of Sri Lanka's Police targeting and abusing Tamil youth. In late January 2024 a Tamil youth, recently released from a Jaffna prison, died mysteriously, with a post-mortem ordered to ascertain the cause of death. In November 2023 a Tamil youth was tortured to death by Sri Lankan police in Jaffna. [294]

In June 2023, a Tamil man in Mullaitivu was illegally detained, assaulted and tortured by Special Task Force Officers and officials from Sri Lanka's Wildlife Department. Following his release on bail, the victim made a complaint to the Vavuniya Human Rights Commission. [295]

In November 2022, Tamil Guardian reported that the National Police Commission (NPC) had received 9,295 complaints about the Sri Lanka Police's functioning during the last five years. Complaints include cases of unlawful arrest, false charges, assault, torture, partiality, abuse of power, as well as police inaction.[296]

"Sri Lanka's police force is one of the most brutal in the world. They have tortured, raped and killed. They continue to commit crimes with almost absolute impunity," said Kavi, a Tamil activist. [297]

In August 2022, amidst a crackdown by President Ranil Wickremesinghe, leading activists and civilians were arrested by Sri Lankan security forces for their involvement in demonstrations calling for former Sri Lankan president Gotabaya

---

[292] **Investigation launched into Sri Lankan Police's assault of Tamil youth.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 01 February 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/investigation-launched-sri-lankan-polices-assault-tamil-youth

[293] **Sri Lankan state terror - Tamil university student hung upside down and brutally assaulted.** *Tamil Guardian*, (online, 05 February 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-state-terror-tamil-university-student-hung-upside-down-and-brutally-assaulted

[294] **Investigation launched into Sri Lankan Police's assault of Tamil youth.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 01 February 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/investigation-launched-sri-lankan-polices-assault-tamil-youth

[295] **Tamil man files complaint at Human Rights Commission following torture by Sri Lanka's Wildlife Department officials and STF.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 19th June 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamil-man-files-complaint-human-rights-commission-following-torture-sri-lanka-s-wildlife

[296] **Over 9,000 complaints lodged by the public against Sri Lankan Police.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 10 November 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/over-9000-complaints-lodged-public-against-sri-lankan-police

[297] **Over 9,000 complaints lodged by the public against Sri Lankan Police.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 10 November 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/over-9000-complaints-lodged-public-against-sri-lankan-police

Rajapaksa to step down. This included General Secretary of the Ceylon Teachers Union, Joseph Stalin. [298] United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders Mary Lawlor questioned the arrest of Joseph Stalin stating: *"I'm hearing disturbing reports from Sri Lanka that prominent Human Rights Defender, Joseph Stalin, was arrested."* Mary Lawlor further said that the work of Human Rights Defenders like Joseph Stalin had been more important than ever in recent weeks, adding that such work of Human Rights Defenders must be supported and not punished. [299]

In February 2022 Sri Lanka's Terrorism Investigation Division (TID) issued a summons to a Tamil political activist V S Sivakaran, a former head of the ITAK youth wing and well-known political activist, demanding he appear before them in Colombo for questioning. Sivakaran, like many other Tamil activists, had been subject to interrogation by the Sri Lankan security forces before. [300]

In January 2022, a prominent Tamil activist in the Northern Province was killed at sea, when his fishing boat was rammed by a Sri Lankan navy vessel. Mariyaseelan was a well-known and popular activist, having prominently taken part in protests, against the Sri Lankan navy's land grabs in Mathagal, near Jaffna, in recent months.[301]

In September 2021, Ambika Satkunanathan, commissioner of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka from 2015 to 2020, said,

"If you are a Tamil woman activist working in the Northern Province, you will face additional challenges, such as surveillance, constant visits by the security agencies to your house to make inquiries about your activities, and phone calls prior to events or demonstrations to intimidate you from participating." [302]

In September 2021, the International Truth and Justice Project (ITJP) released a report titled Sri Lanka: Torture & Sexual Violence by Security Forces 2020-21. [303] The report contains testimonies from 15 Tamils who had been abducted, detained and tortured by Sri Lanka security forces, since Gotabaya Rajapaksa took office as Sri Lanka's president in 2019. The witnesses have now fled the island and reside in the UK. The ITJP report noted that a "new generation of

---

[298] **Protestors demand release of arrested union leader**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, 4 August 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/protestors-demand-release-arrested-union-leader

[299] **Joseph Stalin's arrest: UN special rapporteur concerned.** *Newswire* (online, 4 August 2022). https://www.newswire.lk/2022/08/04/joseph-stalins-arrest-un-special-rapporteur-concerned/

[300] **Sri Lanka's Terrorism Investigation Division summon Tamil activist again.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 16 February 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-s-terrorism-investigation-division-summon-tamil-activist-again

[301] **Anger in Jaffna after leading Tamil protestor killed by Sri Lankan navy.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 12 January 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/anger-jaffna-after-leading-tamil-protestor-killed-sri-lankan-navy

[302] **The criminal justice system in South Asia is discriminatory and violent"**: Ambika Satkunanathan. (online, 26 September 2021) https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/trends/features/the-criminal-justice-system-in-south-asia-is-discriminatory-and-violent-ambika-satkunanathan-7509391.html

[303] **Sri Lanka: Torture & Sexual Violence by Security Forces 2020-21.** *International Truth and Justice Project. Sept.2021*. https://itjpsl.com/assets/ITJP-Torture-report-2021-Sep-ENGLISH.pdf

Tamils" are being victimised for exercising their constitutional rights." "The victims being detained now are generally young and of little intelligence value to the security forces, who appear to be mounting a campaign of repression against legitimate Tamil expression of fundamental rights including protests or calls for accountability." [304]

In June 2021, the International Truth and Justice Project (ITJP) released a statement highlighting recent cases of "abduction and torture of Tamils perpetrated by the Sri Lankan security forces under the government of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa," with the most recent documented case occurring in November 2020. ITJP's Executive Director, Yasmin Sook said that numerous victims arriving in the UK had been tortured, and more than half of those interviewed appear to have been picked up because they were involved in campaigning against the election of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and participating in protests by the families of the disappeared. One of the youngest witnesses was only 19 when he was detained, tortured and brutally raped. Three victims attempted to kill themselves after reaching safety in the UK. The perpetrators include the Sri Lankan Army and counter-terrorism police. [305]

In June 2021, Human Rights Watch reported that Sri Lanka's police were increasingly killing and abusing people under cover of the Covid-19 pandemic measures and an anti-drug campaign. Recent police abuses reported in the media included alleged extrajudicial killings, torture, and arbitrary detention. [306] In June 2021, Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka reported that in Batticaloa district, Eastern Province, a young Tamil man died while in police custody after he was brutally assaulted in front of his family members, before being taken to the police station on drug-related offences. [307] An initial autopsy led by the Special Judicial Medical Officer (JMO) cited a drug overdose as the cause of death. However, a second autopsy in November 2021 reportedly revealed signs of torture. There were at least 31 different injuries on the body of the young Tamil man. [308] [309]

The US State Department's Human Rights Practices 2020 Country Report for Sri Lanka cited allegations of ongoing torture. Interviews by human rights organizations found that torture and excessive use of force by police, particularly

---

[304] **New ITJP report documents ongoing abduction, torture and rape of Tamils in the North-East.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 8 September 2021) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/new-itjp-report-documents-ongoing-abduction-torture-and-rape-tamils-north-east

[305] **International Truth & Justice Project. Press release: Not Cricket – Sri Lankan Torture. 26 June 2021.** https://itjpsl.com/assets/press/Final-English-Press-release-ITJP-26-June-2021.pdf

[306] **Sri Lanka: Police Abuses Surge Amid Covid-19 Pandemic.** *Human Rights Watch* (online, 6 August 2021) https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/08/06/sri-lanka-police-abuses-surge-amid-covid-19-pandemic

[307] **Death in Sri Lanka's Police custody: Tamil Youth's body to be exhumed.** *Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka* (online, 20 June 2021) http://www.jdslanka.org/index.php/news-features/human-rights/1029-death-in-sri-lankas-police-custody-tamil-youths-body-to-be-exhumed

[308] **Sri Lankan police officer boasted of 'nine murders' say parents of murdered Tamil youth.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 22 November 2021). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-police-officer-boasted-nine-murders-say-parents-murdered-tamil-youth

[309] **Forensic evidence of torture found on murdered Tamil youth.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 14 November 2021). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/forensic-evidence-torture-found-murdered-tamil-youth

to extract confessions, remained endemic. The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) documented 260 complaints of physical and mental torture from January to August 2020 in addition to 37 complaints from prisoners. In response to allegations of torture, the HRCSL carried out routine visits of detention centers.[310]

Intensified surveillance and harassment:

A pattern of intensified surveillance and harassment of Civil Society Organisations, human rights defenders and victims increased when the Rajapaksa Government came to power.[311] This has continued under the Wickremesinghe and Dissanayake governments.

The Comprehensive Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Situation in Sri Lanka, released on 22nd August 2024, stated:

"Over the reporting period, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) observed a persistent trend of surveillance, intimidation and harassment of journalists and civil society actors, especially those working on enforced disappearances, land seizures, environmental issues, and with former combatants in Sri Lanka's north and east. Torture and ill-treatment by police and security forces remain prevalent in Sri Lanka."

"The High Commissioner recommends that the Human Rights Council and Member States, as applicable: 68(d) Review asylum measures with respect to Sri Lankan nationals to protect those facing reprisals and refrain from any refoulement in cases that present a real risk of torture or other serious human rights violations." [312]

In March 2024, Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated in an Oral Update at the 55th Session of the Human Rights Council:

"My Office continues to receive allegations of surveillance, harassment and arrests by security forces of civil society representatives, journalists and victims, as well as of people who have been involved in organising commemoration events for war victims." [313]

In February 2025, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) in a statement "expressed deep concern that human rights defenders (HRDs)

---

[310] **2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Sri Lanka. Section C. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.** US Department of State. March 30, 2021. https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/sri-lanka/

[311] **Promotion reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka. Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Advance unedited version. Distr.: General. 27 January 2021** (page9, point 32). https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/LK/Sri_LankaReportJan2021.docx

[312] **A/HRC/57/19: Situation of human rights in Sri Lanka - Comprehensive report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights - Advance unedited version. Published 22 August 2024.** [Paragraphs 21, 26 -31, 68 (d)] https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/ahrc5719-situation-human-rights-sri-lanka-comprehensive-report-united-nations

[313] **Human Rights Council Updated on Regime's Abuses.** *Groundviews* (online, 3rd July 2024). https://groundviews.org/2024/03/07/human-rights-council-updated-on-regimes-abuses/

advocating for the rights of Rohingya asylum seekers had forwarded complaints to the HRCSL with respect to harassment by law enforcement officials on account of their legitimate activities. All state institutions, including law enforcement authorities, should respect the rights of HRDs to express themselves and organise and participate in peaceful assemblies for the purpose of protesting any government policy, including any decision to repatriate Rohingya asylum seekers." State institutions should refrain from threatening, intimidating, or harassing HRDs who organise and participate in such peaceful assemblies." [314]

In September 2025, Tamil activist K. Sinthujan of Trincomalee was interrogated by the Counter Terrorism and Investigation Division (CTID) for the second time in two months in connection with a remembrance event held in 2023. Tamil activists say the repeated targeting of Sinthujan underscores Colombo's ongoing criminalisation of Tamil memorialisation and political activity. [315]

In August, the CTID summoned Sanmugaraja Jeevaraja, a former Kilinochchi local councillor, over the collection of school equipment. Human rights defenders have condemned these summons as part of a broader campaign of intimidation aimed at stifling Tamil political voices in the North-East. [316]

In June 2025, Trincomalee activist Sebastian Devi was interrogated by Sri Lanka's Terrorism Investigation Division (TID) ahead of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk' visit to Sri Lanka. The TID officers demanded detailed information about her affiliations with organisations, both local and international and questioned her about her previous visits to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva and who had financed her travel. [317]

In June 2025, Lavan, a representative from the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) was contacted by Trincomalee Criminal Investigation Department and questioned whether a protest was being planned by Devi and Lavan during the visit of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to Sri Lanka.[318]

In June 2025, Batticaloa social activist E. Premnath was arrested by police without a warrant at his workplace and subjected to physical and mental abuse.

---

[314] **Sri Lanka should refrain from harassing human rights defenders: HRCSL.** *Economy Next* (online, 06 February 2025). https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-should-refrain-from-harassing-human-rights-defenders-hrcsl-203760/

[315] **Sri Lanka criminalises Tamil memorialisation as activist summoned again.** *Tamil Guardian* (online September 3, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-criminalises-tamil-memorialisation-activist-summoned-again

[316] **Sri Lanka criminalises Tamil memorialisation as activist summoned again.** *Tamil Guardian* (online September 3, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-criminalises-tamil-memorialisation-activist-summoned-again

[317] **Trincomalee activist interrogated by Sri Lanka's TID ahead of UN visit.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, June 20, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tid-questions-trincomalee-disappeared-families-chairperson-over-international-links

[318] Ibid.

He was released a day later without charge and without being provided with any formal legal papers. [319]

In May 2025, a Tamil woman residing in Mullaitivu District, alleged that she and her children were being subjected to ongoing harassment and intimidation by Sri Lankan intelligence officers who repeatedly visited her home questioning her as to whether she was a former combatant and leaving her and her young children deeply distressed. [320]

In May 2025, Sri Lanka's Counter Terrorism Investigation Division (CTID) summoned Vasuki Vallipuram, a well-known women's rights activist and Coordinator of the Women Life and Rights Association – Kilinochchi, for interrogation. They requested she bring complete details of all the beneficiaries of her organisation. Vasuki has been a prominent voice advocating for women's rights in the Tamil homeland. Her summons has raised concerns among civil society groups, who view it as part of a continuing trend of intimidation and surveillance targeting Tamil activists and community leaders. [321]

In February 2025, Innasimuttu Sathyaseelan, a teacher in Killinochi, was summoned for the second time and interrogated for 10 hours by the Sri Lankan Police Counterterrorism Investigation Division (CTID) over an art installation created by his students, and asked to name all the students involved. The installation depicted traditional Tamil areas on the island. The officers questioned Sathyaseelan as to whether he was attempting to revive the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). [322]

In December 2024, the North-East coordinating committee (NECC), a group of civil society organizations, women-led community-based organisations and fishermen staged a protest in Mullaitivu against repatriating the Rohingya asylum seekers. "The HRCSL was later reliably informed that two HRDs were summoned by the Human Trafficking, Smuggling, and Maritime Crimes Investigation Division of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to record statements with respect to the said protests," HRCSL said. [323]

---

[319] **Sri Lankan police arrest and assault Batticaloa activist without warrant.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, June 9, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/social-activist-speaks-out-against-unlawful-arrest-and-assault-batticaloa

[320] **Sri Lankan intelligence officers harass Tamil woman in Mullaitivu**. *Tamil Guardian* (online 2 May, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/mullaitivu-woman-alleges-harassment-intelligence-officers-despite-being-victim-assault

[321] **Sri Lanka's CTID summons Tamil women's rights activist for interrogation.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, May 28, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/ctid-summons-kilinochchi-womens-rights-activist-interrogation

[322] **Sri Lankan police target Tamil teacher over student art installation.** T*amil Guardian* (online, 17 February 2025). https://tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-police-target-tamil-teacher-over-student-art-installation

[323] **Sri Lanka should refrain from harassing human rights defenders: HRCSL.** *Economy Next* (online, 06 February 2025). https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-should-refrain-from-harassing-human-rights-defenders-hrcsl-203760/

In December 2024, Sri Lanka's Terrorism Investigation Division summoned Navarathnarasa Anjalidevi, a 60-year-old Tamil female social activist. Anjalidevi, a noted figure in community activism, has been actively involved in societal welfare initiatives. She previously served in the Asian Human Rights Commission highlighting her dedication to human rights and social justice. This recent development comes amidst concerns about the challenges faced by Tamils engaged in activism. [324]

In July 2024, CIVICUS Monitor reported that the intimidation of Tamil political activists had become routine across the North-East, where Sri Lankan security forces maintain a massive military and police presence. [325]

Sri Lanka's Terrorism Investigation Division (TID) summoned at least seven Tamil political activists in the North-East for questioning during April to June 2024. [326]

In June 2024, the former chairman of the Batticaloa district youth wing of Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi (ITAK), Lohitharaja Deepakaran, and the coordinator of the Tamil Youth People's Movement, Jeevarathinam Thaveswaran were summoned for questioning by the TID. [327] CIVICUS Monitor reported that Thaveswaran believed this action to be politically motivated, especially in light of his movement's support for a Tamil public candidate in the upcoming Sri Lankan presidential election. [328]

In June 2024, masked individuals, carrying weapons and on unmarked motorbikes, circled the home of Parliamentarian and Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi (ITAK) leader Sivagnanam Shritharan's residence in Jaffna. Shritharan has been a vocal critic of the Sri Lankan government and has highlighted the ongoing issues faced by Tamils in the North-East. [329] Shritharan reiterated that this was an indication of a prevailing death threat against him. He further said that the Sri

---

[324] **Sri Lanka's Terrorism Investigation Division summons Tamil woman activist in Trincomalee.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 02 December 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankas-terrorism-investigation-division-summons-tamil-woman-activist-trincomalee

[325] **Sri Lanka: Authorities continue to target activists, stifle protests and silence journalists, as elections draw near.** *CIVICUS Monitor* (online, 31/7/2024). https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/sri-lanka-authorities-continue-to-target-activists-stifle-protests-and-silence-journalists-as-elections-draw-near/

[326] **Sri Lanka's TID summons more Tamil activists**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, 13 June 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-s-tid-summons-more-tamil-activists

[327] Ibid.

[328] **Sri Lanka: Authorities continue to target activists, stifle protests and silence journalists, as elections draw near.** CIVICUS Monitor (online, 31/7/2024). https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/sri-lanka-authorities-continue-to-target-activists-stifle-protests-and-silence-journalists-as-elections-draw-near/

[329] M**asked individuals on motorcycles circle ITAK leader's home in Jaffna.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 29 June 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/masked-individuals-motorcycles-circle-itak-leaders-home-jaffna

Lankan Navy, Air Force, Police, and Intelligence Units were behind many of the nefarious crimes being committed in Jaffna. [330]

In July 2024, officers from Sri Lanka's counter terrorism department interrogated staff at a Tamil school in Kilinochchi, after students created an art display resembling an archway that stood in front of Thuyilum Ilam (resting places honouring Tamils killed during the civil war). [331]

In March 2024, Sri Lanka's State Intelligence Services filed a report against the principal of the Koppay Teaching College, S Laleesan, accusing him of 'provoking the Tamil youth to rise up and disturb the ethnic harmony' at a panel discussion. The intelligence monitoring and subsequent investigation has been condemned by the Jaffna Teachers Union who said it violated the individual's fundamental right to freedom of expression. [332]

In January 2024, Tamil civil society activist Kurusumuthu V. Lavakumar was questioned for five hours by Sri Lanka's Terrorism Investigation Department (TID) over his participation in a Tamil Genocide Day commemoration in 2021. Lavakumar, who has been repeatedly harassed, called upon organisations, civil society, and the international community to ensure that individuals like him are not subjected to continued threats and harassment. [333]

In January 2024, a 16-year-old Tamil boy was interrogated by Sri Lankan police over a kite that was adorned with a map of Tamil Eelam at the Mullaitivu Kite Festival. [334]

In December 2023, Public Security Minister Tiran Alles told Parliament that the entire population of Sri Lanka would be registered with Police due to the high crime rate. He said that the aim was to create an internet database where any Sri Lankan can be identified at any time. Information would be collected to know about the people living in each home and their ethnicity. Records would be maintained so that if a person hides in another province they can be found. *"Even*

---

[330] **Sri Lankan security forces behind nefarious activities in Jaffna – Shritharan.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 12 July 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-security-forces-behind-nefarious-activities-jaffna-shritharan

[331] **Sri Lanka's counter terrorism police interrogate Tamil students and staff over school decoration**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, 29 August 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-s-counter-terrorism-police-interrogate-tamil-students-and-staff-over-school

[332] **Sri Lankan intelligence files report on Tamil principal of Koppay Teaching College.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 18 March 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-intelligence-files-report-tamil-principal-koppay-teaching-college

[333] **Sri Lanka's TID questions Tamil civil society activist over a closed case.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 29th January 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankas-tid-questions-tamil-civil-society-activist-over-closed-case

[334] **Sri Lankan police interrogate Tamil boy over Tamil Eelam kite.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 29th January 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-police-interrogate-tamil-boy-over-tamil-eelam-kite

though the war is over, crime has increased. We are now building a new computer database so that anyone can be identified at any time," the Minister said. [335] [336]

In October 2023, international human rights organisation Front Line Defenders reported continuing reprisals against peaceful protesters, human rights defenders, civil society activists and journalists especially in the North and East of Sri Lanka. [337]

In September 2023, Tamil activist Balraj Rajkumar was subjected to prolonged questioning by the Counter-Terrorism and Investigation Department (CTID) in the Eastern Province. Balraj Rajkumar is known for his vocal opposition to the forcible acquisition of Tamil people's lands in the Eastern Province and has been an active advocate for the rights of the Tamil people. [338]

In September 2023, police fired tear gas in attempts to disperse a protest staged by the Students' Union of the Peradeniya University. [339]

In July 2023, activists lit oil lamps in the capital Colombo commemorating the hundreds killed in 1983 anti-Tamil riots that fuelled a deadly civil war. Authorities deployed heavily armed troops that outnumbered demonstrators. [340]

In June 2023, Tamil National People's Front (TNPF) leader Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam MP was assaulted and a loaded gun drawn on him by plain clothes state intelligence officers, when the TNPF leader asked the men to identify themselves at a party meeting. The leader and two TNPF activists were later arrested by police.[341] Tamil MPs and British politicians condemned the arrest of the TNPF leader and called for his immediate release.

Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MP, Sivagnanam Sritharan, slammed the incident as an illustration of "*extreme repression"* and said that it shows the harm "*the*

---

[335] **All citizens to be registered with the Police.** *Sri Lanka Mirror* (online, 13th December 2023). https://srilankamirror.com/news/all-citizens-to-be-registered-with-the-police/

[336] **Police recording ethnicity of residents in Colombo, other areas.** *Colombo Gazette* (online, 11th December, 2023). https://colombogazette.com/2023/12/11/police-recording-ethnicity-of-residents-in-colombo-other-areas-44/

[337] **Sri Lanka: Journalists and activists targeted, protests stifled and new restrictive laws proposed.** *CIVICUS* (online, 13th October 2023). https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/sri-lanka-journalists-and-activists-targeted-protests-stifled-and-new-restrictive-laws-proposed/

[338] **Sri Lanka: Journalists and activists targeted, protests stifled and new restrictive laws proposed.** *CIVICUS* (online, 13th October 2023). https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/sri-lanka-journalists-and-activists-targeted-protests-stifled-and-new-restrictive-laws-proposed/

[339] **Sri Lanka: Journalists and activists targeted, protests stifled and new restrictive laws proposed.** *CIVICUS* (online, 13th October 2023). https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/sri-lanka-journalists-and-activists-targeted-protests-stifled-and-new-restrictive-laws-proposed/

[340] **Sri Lanka: Journalists and activists targeted, protests stifled and new restrictive laws proposed.** *CIVICUS* (online, 13th October 2023). https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/sri-lanka-journalists-and-activists-targeted-protests-stifled-and-new-restrictive-laws-proposed/

[341] **Marunthankerny police tells TNPF leader that he could face arrest.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 05 June 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/marunthankerny-police-tells-tnpf-leader-he-could-face-arrest

military and state investigators can pose to the normal lives of ordinary Tamil people".[342]

TNA MP Rasamanickam R. Shanakiyan, said that the issue of harassment by plainclothes officers is common as MPs are under constant surveillance.[343]

"This is a chilling reminder even elected representatives of Tamils speaking about justice for mass atrocities & a political solution to the ethnic conflict aren't safe," said British MP Elliot Colburn, All Party Parliamentary Group Chair for Tamils.

"Democratically elected representatives of the Tamil community should be able to speak up for their constituents without fear of prison or worse," said British MP Gareth Thomas.[344]

Following the threatening of TNPF leader Gajendrakumar Ponnnambalam and his subsequent arrest and release on bail, Chairman of the Oversight Committee on National Security, former Rear Admiral, Sarath Weerasekara MP warned that Tamil MPs must know their place or face arrest.

"Tamil MPs need to know their place, if not they will be locked up in prison," Weerasekara stated.[345]

In January 2023, Civil Society leader Velan Swamigal was arrested while peacefully protesting. "It represents the latest brazen move by authorities in their campaign to silence those who speak up for Tamil rights," said British MP Elliot Colburn, the Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Tamils.[346]

'The OHCHR continues to receive reports of surveillance, intimidation and harassment of journalists, human rights defenders, families of the disappeared and persons involved in memorialization initiatives by intelligence services, the military and the police, in particular in the north and east'
stated the Situation of Human Rights in Sri Lanka -Comprehensive Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in October 2022.[347]

---

[342] **An act of 'extreme repression' – TNA MP condemns intimidation of TNPF leader.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 02 June 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/act-extreme-repression-tna-mp-condemns-intimidation-tnpf-leader

[343] **Tamil MPs condemn the arrest of TNPF leader.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 07 June 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamil-mps-condemn-arrest-tnpf-leader

[344] **British politicians have condemned the arrest of Tamil National People's Front leader Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam and have called for his immediate release.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 07 June 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamil-mps-are-not-safe-british-politicians-condemn-arrest-tnpfs-leader

[345] **Tamil MPs 'need to know their place, if not they will be locked up' - Sarath Weerasekara** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 15 June 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamil-mps-need-know-their-place-if-not-they-will-be-locked-sarah-weerasekara

[346] **British MPs slam arrest of Tamil civil society leader** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 21 January 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/british-mps-slam-arrest-tamil-civil-society-leader

[347] **A/HRC/51/5: Situation of human rights in Sri Lanka - Comprehensive report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.** Published 04 October 2022. [page7, Section IV D: 30-32]. https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/ahrc515-situation-human-rights-sri-lanka-comprehensive-report-united-nations-high

In September 2022, Tamil Guardian reported that "offices of civil society organisations in Batticaloa, Eastern Province, had been broken into and important documentation stolen from the premises as a part of Sri Lanka's ongoing campaign to crack down on those highlighting the island's abuses." Tamils in Batticaloa and Jaffna held demonstrations calling on the Sri Lankan government to protect human rights of civil society organisations and human rights defenders.[348]

In September 2022, human rights defender Sabharatnam Sivayoganathan (Seelan), received a summons to appear before the Counter-Terrorism Investigation Division (CTID) for interrogation. The reason for the questioning was not given. Seelan had been vocal about the reprisals and intimidation faced by regional journalists, military land grabbing, militarization and the Presentation of Terrorism Act. [349]

In April 2021, the Mayor of Jaffna was arrested by Sri Lanka's Terrorism Investigation Division (TID) under accusations of attempting to resurrect the LTTE, despite the lack of any discernible evidence. The arrest was internationally condemned and slammed by Tamil Parliamentarians across the North-East.[350]

Muslim activists have received death threats when speaking out against Islamophobia. Many have been told that if they were to speak out and file a case in the international court of law they would have to face "dire consequences." Those openly criticizing Islamophobic policies that the government had implemented, such as forced cremations, were being threatened with arrest and danger to their families.[351]

In March 2021, the Sri Lankan government issued a gazette announcing the proscription of hundreds of Tamils and several diaspora organisations. The organisations included Tamil advocacy groups such as the British Tamil Forum; the Canadian Tamil Congress; the Australian Tamil Congress; the Global Tamil Forum; the National Council of Canadian Tamils; the Tamil Youth Organisation; and the World Tamil Coordinating Committee. The disclosure of names and

---

[348] **'Protect our human rights!' - Tamils demonstrate in the North-East.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 14 September 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/protect-our-human-rights-tamils-demonstrate-north-east

[349] **Human Rights Defender Sabharatnam Sivayoganathan Summoned for Questioning by the Counter-Terrorism Investigation Division.** *Frontline Defenders* (online, 21st September 2022). https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/human-rights-defender-sabharatnam-sivayoganathan-summoned-questioning-counter-terrorism

[350] **Groups spread lies about white vans, crocodiles and sharks – Gotabaya Rajapaksa.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 12 April 2021). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/groups-spread-lies-about-white-vans-crocodiles-and-sharks-gotabaya-rajapaksa-0

[351] Tasnim Nazeer. **Sri Lankan Muslims Fear Speaking Out. A crackdown on dissenting voices — those denouncing Islamophobia and criticizing the government — has Sri Lanka's Muslims afraid to speak out.** *The Diplomat* (online, 9 April 2021). https://thediplomat.com/2021/04/sri-lankan-muslims-fear-speaking-out/

addresses placed those listed as living in Sri Lanka at grave and immediate risk.[352]
The British Tamil Forum noted that this action was taken to "stop all forms of communication between Tamils in the North and East and civil societies political parties and Tamil diaspora".[353]

"I urge the international community to listen to the determined, courageous, persistent calls of victims and their families for justice, and heed the early warning signs of more violations to come," the UN Human Rights Commissioner Michelle Bachelet said in January 2021. [354]

By December 2020, over 40 civil society organizations had approached the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) with reports of harassment, surveillance and repeated scrutiny by a range of security services - including Criminal Investigation Department, Terrorist Investigation Division and State Intelligence officials – who questioned them about administrative details and activities of the organization, lists of staff, including their personal contact details, donors and funding sources. Some were questioned about the whereabouts of their relatives abroad. The Secretary-General and Special Procedures have received similar allegations of surveillance and reprisals.[355]

Tamil marginalization in state institutions and committees:

Tamil voices were further marginalized by the Rajapaksa government in state institutions and committees. In November 2020 President Rajapaksa appointed only Sinhalese to the board of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka.[356] This was not long after he gave a speech in which he declared that the Sinhalese "rallied because they had legitimate fears that the Sinhala race, our religion, national resources and the heritage would be threatened with destruction in the face of various local and foreign forces and ideologies that support separatism, extremism and terrorism." [357] He also appointed only Sinhalese to an archaeology task force, overseen by the military, because he intended to

---

[352] **Sri Lanka proscribes hundreds alongside Tamil diaspora organisations.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 27 March 2021). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-proscribes-hundreds-alongside-tamil-diaspora-organisations

[353] **Tamil organisations speak out against Sri Lanka's ban.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 4 April 2021). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamil-organisations-speak-out-against-sri-lankas-ban

[354] **UN report warns of 'seeds of future violence' in Sri Lanka.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 27 January 2021) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/un-report-warns-seeds-future-violence-sri-lanka

[355] **Promotion reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka. Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Advance unedited version. Distr.: General. 27 January 2021** (page9, point 32).

[356] **Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission staffed with all Sinhalese nominations by Gotabaya Rajapaksa.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 26 November 2020) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-human-rights-commission-staffed-all-sinhalese-nominations-gotabaya-rajapaksa

[357] **Gotabaya speaks on 'Sinhala race' and strengthening security in televised address.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 19 November 2020) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/gotabaya-speaks-sinhala-race-and-strengthening-security-televised-address

"preserve our Buddhist and national heritage."[358] In the Northern Province, during 2021, Sinhala government officers were appointed in Tamil areas, violating the tradition of appointing Tamil officers to Tamil-majority areas.[359]

In December 2024, President Anura Kumara Dissanayake established a controversial new Presidential Task Force, with the heads of the armed forces and no Tamil or Muslim representation, with the goal "of elevating society to a more advanced status through a social, environmental and ethical awakening".[360]

Seizing of historical Tamil lands:

During the Governance of Gotabaya Rajapaksa there was an increase in land-related concerns and militarisation,[361] with growing fears from Tamils, politicians and elected council members over the seizing of lands in historical Tamil areas in the north and east and increasing Sinhala colonisation. Tamil names of places were erased and changed to Sinhala names.[362] The Sri Lankan Archaeological Department has been accused of attempting to 'Sinhalise' Tamil historical and cultural areas by confiscating large areas, identifying them as 'archaeological sites' and occupying these sites.[363] [364] In many instances Tamil farmers have been evicted and displaced with the support of the Sri Lankan government's armed forces and the Sri Lankan Archaeological Department.[365] The escalating number of land grabs, enabled by the Sri Lankan military, are heavily impacting on the livelihoods of Tamils across the North-East.[366] A Sinhala Buddhist monk who was a member of the Presidential Task Force on

---

[358] **Gotabaya speaks on 'Sinhala race' and strengthening security in televised address.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 19 November 2020) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/gotabaya-speaks-sinhala-race-and-strengthening-security-televised-address

[359] **TNA Leader complains against appointing Sinhala officers to Tamil areas.** *The Island* Online (online, 30 July 2021). https://island.lk/tna-leader-complains-against-appointing-sinhala-officers-to-tamil-areas/

[360] **The 'Clean Sri Lanka' Task Force: militarised and exclusive.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 21 December 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/clean-sri-lanka-task-force-militarised-and-exclusive

[361] **Tamil politicians and locals in Jaffna protest against Sri Lankan navy land grab efforts.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 10 November 2020) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamil-politicians-and-locals-jaffna-protest-against-sri-lankan-navy-land-grab-efforts

[362] **Sri Lanka accelerates Sinhalisation across Vavuniya.** *Tamil Guardian* (online 12 November 2020). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-accelerates-sinhalisation-across-vavuniya

[363] **High court imposes injunction against Sri Lanka Archaeology Department land occupation in Trincomalee.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 10 November 2020). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/high-court-imposes-injunction-against-sri-lanka-archaeology-department-land-occupation

[364] **'They threatened to shoot me in the head for destroying Buddhist culture'.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 24 June 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/they-threatened-shoot-me-head-destroying-buddhist-culture'

[365] **'Army prevents us from entering our own farmland,' Vavuniya farmers lament.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 29 September 2020). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/%E2%80%98army-prevents-us-entering-our-own-farmland%E2%80%99-vavuniya-farmers-lament

[366] **Sri Lankan army establishes 'firing zone' in Batticaloa grazing land.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 12 July 2021) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-army-establishes-firing-zone-batticaloa-grazing-land

archaeology in the Eastern Province stated that 'tenant' Tamils shouldn't cause problems for the 'landlord' Sinhalese, claiming that there is *"no proof that the North and East are historical Tamil provinces. Just like tenants don't cause any hassle to the landlords, the minority communities shouldn't cause any trouble to the majority in the country."*[367]

Land-grabbing by the military and Sri Lankan Archaeological Department continued under the Wickremesinghe Government and is continuing under the Dissanayake Government. Despite repeated calls for demilitarisation, Colombo continues to maintain one of the densest military occupations in the world in the Tamil homeland, entrenching economic, social and environmental hardship for the population.

In October 2025, the Chairman of the Karai Thuraipattu Pradeshiya Sabha, Chinnarasa Logeswaran, accused the Department of Archaeology of unlawfully taking control of lands traditionally owned by Tamil farmers in Kumulamunai, Thanni Murippu, and Kurunthurmalai — areas that form part of the Tamil people's historic homeland in the North-East. He said the department's actions, carried out under the guise of archaeological protection, were in fact part of a systematic effort to seize Tamil lands and expand Sinhala Buddhist control.[368] Vanni District parliamentarian Thurairasa Ravikaran condemned this as a "deliberate act of Tamil erasure" by the Sri Lankan Department of Archaeology. He noted that over 300 acres of Tamil-owned residential and agricultural lands surrounding Kurunthurmalai have been illegally fenced and occupied by the department without legitimate justification.[369]

In October 2025, S. Thavapalan, the Tamil National People's Front (TNPF) organiser in Vavuniya, lodged a police complaint alleging that a local leader from the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) had threatened to kill him for exposing ongoing illegal occupation of Tamil-owned lands in the Thirivaithakulam area.[370]

In September 2025, Tamil landowners, peacefully protesting the military occupation of their lands in Myliddy, Northern Province, were brutally dispersed by Sri Lankan police. [371]

---

[367] **Sinhala Buddhist monk warns 'minorities' that 'tenants should not trouble landlords'.** Tamil Guardian (online, 8 September 2020). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sinhala-buddhist-monk-warns-minorities-tenants-should-not-trouble-landlords

[368] **Tamil local official condemns Sri Lankan state's continued land grabs in Kurunthurmalai.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, Oct 20, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/logeswaran-condemns-archaeology-departments-encroachment-tamil-farmlands

[369] **Tamil MP warns of Sri Lankan "state-sponsored erasure".** *Tamil Guardian* (online, Oct 20, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/index.php/content/ravikaran-condemns-fabricated-buddhist-narratives-kurunthurmalai

[370] **TNPF organiser in Vavuniya receives death threats after exposing Tamil land grab.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, October 13, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/index.php/content/tnpf-organiser-files-police-complaint-over-death-threat-slpp-leader-vavuniya

[371] **Tamil landowners assaulted during Myliddy protest as Sri Lankan president visits Jaffna**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, September 03, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamil-landowners-brutally-dispersed-during-mayiliddy-protest-ahead-sri-lankan-presidents

In September 2025, the Sri Lankan navy and army extracted tens of thousands of litres daily from village wells in Valikaman, Northern Province, leaving them saline. Local villagers were forced to buy drinking water. The crisis has fuelled growing anger among farmers who fear their livelihoods are now at risk. A local Divisional Councillor stated that the already water-scarce region is being pushed into crisis as military camps plunder local resources.[372]

In June 2025, the Kopay Divisional Secretary confirmed that the Sri Lankan police are illegally occupying private Tamil-owned lands in Jaffna district. refusing to vacate the area despite longstanding demands from landowners. The illegal occupation without authorisation has persisted for more than 30 years, despite repeated appeals from landowners for the return of their property. [373]

In May 2025, Tamil activist Sivakumar Kirupan was arrested and remanded following a false complaint by a Sinhala Buddhist monk involved in the construction of a controversial vihara (Buddhist temple) in Periyakulam, Trincomalee District. Kirupan is known for his activism against land encroachments in Tamil areas. [374]

In May 2025, three Tamil farmers, who were working their ancestral farmlands, were detained by Sri Lankan police after monks claimed they were cultivating within a protected archaeological zone. The incident at Kurunthurmalai came amid ongoing concerns over Sinhala Buddhist encroachment and the misuse of archaeology to seize Tamil lands. Buddhist monks, often accompanied by military personnel and state officials, increasingly asserted control over historically Tamil sites under the guise of archaeological preservation - a practice widely condemned by Tamil civil society. [375]

In March 2025, the Sri Lankan government issued a Gazette notification announcing the mass appropriation of lands across the Tamil homeland, including large coastal areas from Pudumatalan to Mullivaikkal—site of Sri Lanka's genocide of Tamils in May 2009. The land seizures stand in stark contrast to pledges made by the National People's Power (NPP) and Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake to return land held by state agencies. [376]

---

[372] **Sri Lankan military drains Tamil wells, leaving Valikamam villagers desperate for water**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, September 23, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-military-and-navy-exploitation-village-wells-turns-water-saline-valikamam-west

[373] **Sri Lankan police illegally occupying Tamil land in Jaffna, Divisional Secretary confirms.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, June 13, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/kopay-police-occupy-private-lands-over-30-years-refuse-vacate-despite-court-proceedings?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

[374] **Tamil youth activist arrested over opposition to illegal Buddhist vihara in Trincomalee.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 4 May, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/buddhist-monks-false-allegation-leads-arrest-tamil-youth-trincomalee

[375] **Arrest of Tamil farmers risks fueling ethnic unrest warns Tamil MP.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 15 May, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/ravikaran-slams-ethnic-bias-arrest-tamil-farmers-kurunthurmalai

[376] **Sri Lankan government moves to seize Tamil lands in Mullivaikkal.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 3 May, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-government-moves-seize-thousands-acres-around-mullivaikkal

After intense backlash from Tamil politicians and civil society, the Gazette notification was revoked in May 2025. Tamil leaders expressed caution about the reversal, noting that this is not the first time the state has backtracked under pressure only to reintroduce similar efforts through other bureaucratic means.[377]

In February 2025, Sri Lankan Forest Department officials intimidated and assaulted Tamil residents of Kattumurivu, a border village in the Vakarai region of Batticaloa, torching their homes. The officials claimed jurisdiction over the area and demanded the immediate evacuation of locals. Two civil society activists were also severely beaten. *Tamil Guardian* reported that the attack in Kattumurivu is part of a broader pattern of land grabs and state-backed violence in Tamil areas, where Sri Lankan authorities have been systematically displacing local populations under the pretext of environmental conservation and development projects. [378]

In January 2025, residents of Verugal, Trincomalee, protested against the Department of Archaeology's designation of an archaeological zone, fearing it could lead to Sinhalisation, land displacement, and further militarisation in the area. The protest saw participation from residents of Verugal, civil society organizations, and human rights activists, all united in their call for justice and preservation of their cultural heritage. [379]

Human Rights Watch in their World Report 2025 reported that

'Government agencies continued to appropriate Hindu and Muslim religious sites and lands occupied by Tamil and Muslim communities, on a variety of pretexts, in some cases to convert them into Buddhist temples. In particular, the government's Department of Archaeology identified longstanding Hindu temples as ancient Buddhist sites, and the army constructed Buddhist monuments at Hindu temples while Hindu worshippers were denied access. Eight Hindu worshippers were arrested by police while engaging in festival rituals in March, detained for more than 10 days, and allegedly abused.' [380]

In March 2024, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk, in his Oral Update to the 55th Session of the UN Human Rights Council said:

"Land disputes continue to escalate in the north and east of the country impacting on people's livelihoods. Provincial Councils and local government bodies, that promised a measure of devolution, are not currently constituted." [381]

---

[377] **Sri Lanka revokes controversial land acquisition gazette following Tamil resistance**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, 27 May, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-government-revokes-controversial-land-acquisition-gazette-following-tamil

[378] **Sri Lankan government officials beat locals and torch homes Batticaloa.** Tamil Guardian (online, 27 February 2025. https://www.tamilguardian.com/index.php/content/land-dispute-turns-violent-forest-officials-torch-homes-batticaloa

[379] **Tamils in Trincomalee protest against Sinhalisation** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 6 January 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/index.php/content/tamils-trincomalee-protest-against-sinhalisation

[380] **World Report 2025 -Sri Lanka**. *Human Rights Watch* https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/sri-lanka

[381] **High Commissioner presents updates on human rights in Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Cyprus and Sri Lanka. OHCHR. 01 March 2024** https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/03/high-commissioner-presents-updates-human-rights-colombia-guatemala

In May 2024, Tamil livestock farmers in Batticaloa alleged that they and their families were threatened by a group affiliated with paramilitary leader and Rajapaksa ally, Pillayan. [382] Pillayan, who leads the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP), has a controversial history and is accused of numerous abuses, including the assassination of former Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MP Joseph Pararajasingham. Pillayan's continued influence and the alleged involvement of his associates in acts of intimidation highlight the ongoing challenges faced by Tamil communities in the region. [383]

In March 2024, Sri Lankan police stormed Hindu temple Vedukkunaari Hill Athi Sivan temple in Vavuniya North. Eight worshippers were arrested whilst Tamil National People's Front (TNPF) MP Selvarajah Kajendren was assaulted by Sri Lankan police. Although Vedukkunaari Hill Athi Sivan temple has been a place of worship for Tamil people for generations, it has been declared as an ancient Buddhist site by Sri Lanka's archaeology department. This forms part of Sri Lanka's ongoing efforts to colonise traditionally Tamil sites. [384] Rights activists told Human Rights Watch the detained people were held for ten days and beaten while in custody, before police allegations were dismissed in court and they were released. [385]

The UN Human Rights Committee in its March 2023 Report noted:

"Reports of new land grabs by the military using threats and intimidation as well as of partial land releases with the military retaining the control of neighboring land. It is also concerned about the forced resettlement of the Tamil community as a result of annexation of their traditional land by the authorities for irrigation and development purposes, and the lack of reparations provided to the affected community. It also notes with concern reports of frequent land disputes in relation to the construction of Buddhist archaeological heritage and forestry conservation sites, especially in the provinces largely inhabited by Tamils and Muslims, which have undermined reconciliation and led to new conflicts." [386]

In October 2023, hundreds of protesters and human rights defenders, embarked on a peaceful march in Batticaloa Eastern Province to protest the ongoing reprisals faced by Tamil farmers due to the seizing of their traditional grazing

---

[382] **Pillayan supporters threaten Tamil livestock farmers in Batticaloa.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 03 May 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/pillayan-supporters-threaten-tamil-livestock-farmers-batticaloa

[383] **Paramilitary aide remanded over sexual abuse charges in Batticaloa.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 05 September 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/paramilitary-aide-remanded-over-sexual-abuse-charges-batticaloa

[384] **ITAK MP calls for release of eight individuals arrested at Vedukkunaari temple.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 11th March 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/itak-mp-calls-release-eight-individuals-arrested-vedukkunaari-temple

[385] **Sri Lankan Authorities Detain Hindu Worshippers.** *Human Rights Watch* (online, 19th March 2024. https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/03/19/sri-lankan-authorities-detain-hindu-worshippers

[386] **UN Human Rights Committee. Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Sri Lanka. 24th March 2023.** [point 34] https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2FC%2FLKA%2FCO%2F6&Lang=en

lands by government authorities for use by Sinhalese settlers. Sri Lankan police responded with excessive force, assault and intimidation, and intelligence officers recorded the protest. Approximately 900 Tamil farming families rely on this land to graze their cattle. [387] [388]

Harassment of Tamils with perceived links to the LTTE:

In October 2025, Sri Lanka's Terrorism Investigation Division (TID) summoned and interrogated for five hours, Tharmalingam Suresh, National Organiser of the Tamil National People's Front (TNPF), Vice President of the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC), and a member of parliamentarian Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam's official staff. According to Ponnambalam, *"The entire line of questioning was based on the allegation that TNPF is involved in the regrouping of the LTTE as it involves itself in memorialization events".* [389]

In November 2024, Sri Lankan police arrested a 43-year-old British citizen for allegedly raising funds for the LTTE, despite him having been in the United Kingdom since the LTTE was militarily defeated. The individual was arrested upon arriving at Bandaranaike International Airport where he was detained by the Immigration Department based on a travel ban issued by the Colombo Magistrate's Court at the request of the Colombo North Crime Division in 2009. [390]

In April 2024, Sri Lanka's Terrorism Investigation Division (TID) interrogated, for nearly three hours, prominent Eelam author Theepachelvan in connection with a book launch event deemed to promote the revival of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). [391]

In March 2024, Former Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) cadre and activist Selvanayagam Aravinthan was summoned and detained in an investigation by Sri Lanka's Terrorism Investigation Department (TID) over a Facebook account. Aravinthan was arrested by Vavuniya police in November 2023 after he questioned army intelligence officers for holding an exhibition

---

[387] **Reprisals against peaceful protesters protesting against ongoing pastureland encroachment in Madhavanai and Mayilathamadu, Batticaloa.** *Frontline Defenders* (online, 13th October 2023). https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/statement-report/reprisals-against-peaceful-protesters-protesting-against-ongoing-pastureland

[388] **Sinhalese settlers feed explosives to Tamil farmer's cattle.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 31 October 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sinhalese-settlers-feed-explosives-tamil-farmers-cattle

[389] **'NPP as rotten as its predecessors' - Ponnambalam condemns TID's questioning of Tamil activist.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, October 22, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/index.php/content/npp-rotten-its-predecessors-ponnambalam-condemns-tids-questioning-tamil-activist

[390] **Sri Lanka arrests British citizen at Colombo airport claiming alleged fundraising for LTTE.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 02 December 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-arrests-british-citizen-colombo-airport-claiming-alleged-fundraising-ltte

[391] **TID questions prominent Eelam writer Theepachelvan over book launch.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 12 April 20240. https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tid-questions-prominent-eelam-writer-theepachelvan-over-book-launch

opposing Maaveerar Naal. [392] Aravinthan has been regularly subjected to harassment by Sri Lanka's police for his social activism. [393]

"Former Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam cadres, including women, are subject to intensive surveillance, regardless of whether they have undergone the Government's "rehabilitation" scheme or not. Female ex-combatants still face serious security risks, including sexual abuse and extortion, by security forces and others. The High Commissioner fears that, without fundamental security sector reforms and the demilitarization of the north and the east, the pervasive culture of surveillance and oppressive environment for the people in these areas will continue." stated the Situation of Human Rights in Sri Lanka -Comprehensive Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in October 2022.[394]

In February 2021 Tamil Guardian reported that dozens of Tamils had been detained in recent months by Sri Lankan security forces, particularly in the Eastern Province, over alleged social media posts with LTTE content.[395]

In November 2020 Sri Lankan police arrested 19 people under the Prevention of Terrorism Act for allegedly posting birthday wishes online in memory of LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, with a further 55 people under investigation.[396]

In October 2020, a land-mark judgement from Britain's Proscribed Organisations Appeal Commission found that the decision to keep the LTTE as a proscribed terrorist organisation was 'flawed' and unlawful. Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa called on the British authorities to ensure a ban was kept on the organisation, claiming the LTTE was "very active".[397] The Sri Lankan Government issued a statement that "The Government of Sri Lanka has sufficient evidence to prove remnants of the LTTE and groups aligned with its terrorist

---

[392] **Sri Lanka's TID summons former LTTE cadre over Facebook account.** *Tamil Guardian* (10 March 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankas-tid-summons-former-ltte-cadre-over-facebook-account

[393] **'We are in a hopeless situation' - Detained former LTTE cadre's son calls for his release.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 11 April 20240. https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/we-are-hopeless-situation-detained-former-ltte-cadres-son-calls-his-release

[394] **A/HRC/51/5: Situation of human rights in Sri Lanka - Comprehensive report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.** Published 04 October 2022. [page7, Section IVD: 32]. https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/ahrc515-situation-human-rights-sri-lanka-comprehensive-report-united-nations-high

[395] **Sri Lanka arrests Tamil youth for Tik Tok posts after 'cyber patrol unit' monitoring.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 26 February 2021). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-arrests-tamil-youth-tik-tok-posts-after-cyber-patrol-unit-monitoring

[396] **Sri Lankan police arrest 19 and mark further 55 for posting Prabhakaran birthday messages.** Tamil Guardian (online, 27 November 2020). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-police-arrest-19-and-mark-further-55-posting-prabhakaran-birthday-messages

[397] **Sri Lankan High Commission scrambles to ensure ban on LTTE is kept.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 26 October 2020). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-high-commission-scrambles-ensure-ban-ltte-kept

ideology are active in foreign countries, working to incite violence and destabilize the country." [398]
In July 2020 Sri Lankan security forces carried out an increasing number of raids across the North-East arresting as many as 22 people, plus more than a dozen Tamil youths on charges of attempting to regroup the LTTE.[399]

In March 2020 security measures were tightened across the North- East following the arrest of six former LTTE cadres and a German citizen alleged to be a former LTTE cadre plotting to revive the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.[400]

Former LTTE combatants and Tamil disappearance activists continue to bear the brunt of the state's security apparatus stated a Report by the Sri Lanka Campaign for Peace and Justice in February 2020.[401]

Continuing and intensifying oppression against Tamils:

In August 2025, the 'Voice of Justice' campaign, organised by the Homeland Action Front, was launched in Chemmani, Jaffna, calling for international justice for genocide committed against the Tamil nation. A petition, demanding justice and accountability for the Tamil nation and signed by people from across the Tamil homeland was submitted to the United Nations ahead of the September Human Rights Council session. [402]

In June 2025, a Social Movement collective from the North-East, sent a statement to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Turk prior to his June visit to Sri Lanka. The statement, signed by sixty-five social activists and civil society organizations from the North and East, highlights that both the civil and security apparatuses of the Sri Lankan state remain instruments of oppression against the Tamil people in the North and East; Tamils are being displaced from their ancestral lands; human rights defenders, activists, and affected individuals are subjected to intimidation and surveillance orchestrated by Sri Lanka's military and intelligence apparatus; and that these actions are perceived as calculated attempts to erase the identity of the Tamil people,

---

[398] **Sri Lanka 'closely monitoring' British ruling on LTTE ban.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 22 October 2020). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-closely-monitoring-british-ruling-ltte-ban

[399] **Sri Lankan police arrest Tamil youth for 'regrouping the LTTE'.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 1 July 2020). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-police-arrest-tamil-youth-%E2%80%98regrouping-ltte%E2%80%99

[400] **Toughened security across North East following conspiracy by 'prominent ex-LTTE cadres' to 'assassinate politician'.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 7 March 2020). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/toughened-security-across-north-east-following-conspiracy-prominent-ex-ltte-cadres

[401] **Sri Lanka Campaign for Peace and Justice, Abandoned Promises? Preserving Human Rights and Pursuing Accountability in Gota's Sri Lanka, February 2020.** https://www.srilankacampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Abandoned-Promises-Sri-Lanka-Campaign-J-February-2020-compressed.pdf

[402] **'Voice of Justice' campaign calls for international accountability for Tamil Genocide.** *Tamil Guardian* (online 28 August, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/voice-justice-campaign-calls-international-accountability-tamil-genocide

undermine their political representation, and push them towards a state of planned genocide. [403]

In January 2025, the CIVICUS Monitor rated the state of civic space in Sri Lanka as 'repressed'. Ongoing concerns include restrictions and disruption of peaceful protests, at times with excessive use of force, and the stifling of journalists. Activists have also been targeted and criminalised using defamation and counter-terror laws, and there has been a systematic failure to address past crimes against them. [404]

In July 2024, the state of civic space in Sri Lanka was rated as 'repressed' by the CIVICUS Monitor. [405]

In April 2024, Amnesty International issued its annual report which highlighted that in 2023 the government continued to use draconian counterterror laws and attempted to bring in new laws to counter dissent and threaten freedom of expression, resulting in arbitrary arrests and detentions. The right to freedom of peaceful assembly was restricted amid continued use of excessive and unnecessary force against protesters. Impunity remained entrenched, with the government making no notable progress around the right to truth, justice and reparation for those affected by war. [406]

Sri Lanka's presidential elections were held on 21st September 2024. CIVICUS Monitor reported that in recent months, human rights groups had documented a clampdown on commemorations around the anniversary of the end of the civil war; Tamil activists had been summoned by the anti-terrorism division; and the anti-terror law had been used to target activists, critics and minorities. There were also concerns about a restrictive NGO law that had been proposed that could restrict freedoms. The authorities restricted gathering and protests, including arresting worshippers around a festival and brutally attacking thousands of protesting teachers. A report showed the unlawful use of weapons in the policing of protests. [407]

---

[403] **Open letter to Rights Commissioner Volker Turk from militarised North & East of Sri Lanka.** *Sri Lanka Brief* (online, 14 June 2025). https://srilankabrief.org/open-letter-to-rights-commissioner-volker-turk-from-militarised-north-east-of-sri-lanka/

[404] **Sri Lanka: Civic space restrictions and targeting of activists persist as new government takes power.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 13 January 2025). https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/sri-lanka-civic-space-restrictions-and-targeting-of-activists-persist-as-new-government-takes-power/

[405] **Sri Lanka: Authorities continue to target activists, stifle protests and silence journalists, as elections draw near.** *CIVICUS Monitor* (online, 31/7/2024). https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/sri-lanka-authorities-continue-to-target-activists-stifle-protests-and-silence-journalists-as-elections-draw-near/

[406] **Sri Lanka: Authorities continue to target activists, stifle protests and silence journalists, as elections draw near.** *CIVICUS Monitor* (online, 31/7/2024). https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/sri-lanka-authorities-continue-to-target-activists-stifle-protests-and-silence-journalists-as-elections-draw-near/

[407] **Sri Lanka: Authorities continue to target activists, stifle protests and silence journalists, as elections draw near.** CIVICUS Monitor (online, 31/7/2024). https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/sri-lanka-authorities-continue-to-target-activists-stifle-protests-and-silence-journalists-as-elections-draw-near/

In February 2023, thousands of Tamils, including Tamil University students, Hindu and Christian religious leaders, Tamil Civil Society groups, Tamil women groups, Tamil trade unions, Tamil farmers, and Fisheries organizations, marched in a four-day rally from the North to the East, protesting continuing discrimination and abuse, and calling for an end to the Sri Lankan military's occupation of the Tamil homeland. They were met with intimidation, surveillance and violence by the Sri Lankan police and military. [408] [409]

In July 2022, a statement from five Tamil civil society organisations demanded "meaningful restructuring of the constitution", such as devolving power towards a more federal form of governance, demilitarisation of the north and east, the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, justice for the disappeared, ratification of the Rome Statute, and the ceasing of land acquisitions by the military and security outposts in the north and east. [410]

In February 2021, tens of thousands of people led by North-East Civil Societies joined one of the largest rallies in the Tamil homeland since the end of the armed conflict in 2009, as they marched in a five-day long campaign across the Tamil homeland from Pottuvil in the east to Polihandy in the north. The march was endorsed by all Tamil political parties, as well as by Tamil and Muslim civil society organisations and Muslim leaders. *"Successive Sri Lankan Sinhala - Buddhist Governments have continually suppressed our right to self- determination and govern us employing brutal military force to annihilate, which amounts to Genocide"*[411]

Sri Lanka's then public security minister Sarath Weerasekara claimed that his regime would file cases against the Tamil protestors who marched through the North-East. "*We receive intelligence reports,*" said Weerasekara. "*We have their photos, and we have their vehicle numbers, we know who these individuals are.*" [412]

In December 2021, 32 individuals, including journalists, activists, politicians, and members of the Families of the Disappeared, who attended the Pottuvil to

---

[408] **Day 4 – Eelam Tamils continue demands to end military occupation.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 07 February 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/day-4-eelam-tamils-continue-demands-end-military-occupation

[409] **Anti-Sri Lanka March by Tamil Univ Students Proceeds, braving Military Blockade. Tamil Demands to be Declared at the End**. *Lanka News* (online, 6th February 2023). https://www.einnews.com/pr_news/615508916/anti-sri-lanka-march-by-tamil-univ-students-proceeds-braving-military-blockade-tamil-demands-to-be-declared-at-the-end

[410] **A chauvinist flag and war crimes: Tamil perspectives of Sri Lanka protests.** *The News Minute* (online, 24 July 2022). https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/chauvinist-flag-and-war-crimes-tamil-perspectives-sri-lanka-protests-166160

[411] **Sri Lanka: Tens of Thousands of Tamils Rally to Call For Freedom and Rejecting Unitary State.** North East Civil Societies. *Einpresswire* (online, 8th February 2021). https://www.einnews.com/pr_news/535338187/sri-lanka-tens-of-thousands-of-tamils-rally-to-call-for-freedom-and-rejecting-unitary-state

[412] **'Tear gassed and arrested, that's what Sumanthiran and Ponnambalan need' - Sri Lankan minister.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 9th February 2021). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tear-gassed-and-arrested-thats-what-sumanthiran-and-ponnambalan-need-sri-lankan-minister

Polikandy (P2P) protests, were summoned by the Pottuvil Magistrate Court, following a request from the Sri Lankan security forces. [413]

In January 2021, 47 Member States of the UN Human Rights Council, elected representatives of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka, leaders of Tamil national political parties, members of the Tamil victim communities and Tamil civil society organizations sent a joint letter urging the UN Human Rights Council to refer Sri Lanka to the International Criminal Court and any other appropriate and effective international accountability mechanisms to inquire into the crime of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The letter stated:

"The continuing and intensifying oppression against the Tamils including militarisation, indefinite detention of political prisoners, land grab in the name of archaeological explorations, the denial of traditional, collective land rights like cattle grazing rights, intensifying surveillance of political and civil society activists, the denial of burial rights during COVID19 to our Muslim brethren and the denial of the right to memory, underscore the urgency of addressing the deteriorating situation." [414]

Ban imposed on organisations and individuals

Tamil Guardian reported that despite a change in government following the election of Anura Kumara Dissanayake, Sri Lanka has maintained the same policies of criminalising Tamil political activism that were in place under the Rajapaksa regime. [415]

In February 2025, the Dissanayake Government issued an extraordinary gazette continuing the ban of several Tamil diaspora groups claiming they are supporting "terrorism-related activities," and extending a ban that was first introduced more than a decade ago. [416] In May 2025, the Sri Lankan government updated the extraordinary gazette and ordered that all funds belonging to organizations and individuals listed be frozen including any other financial and

[413] **Sri Lankan police persecute journalists that covered the P2P protests.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 22 December 2021). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-police-persecute-journalists-covered-p2p-protests

[414] **Tamils Unitedly Urge UN Human Rights Council to Refer Sri Lanka to International Criminal Court (ICC).** *Tamil News*, *Einpresswire* (online, 17 January 2021) https://www.einnews.com/pr_news/534655598/tamils-unitedly-urge-un-human-rights-council-to-refer-sri-lanka-to-international-criminal-court-icc

[415] **Sri Lanka continues ban on Tamil organisations despite government change.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 24 February 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-continues-ban-tamil-organisations-despite-government-change

[416] **Sri Lanka continues ban on Tamil organisations despite government change.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 24 February 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-continues-ban-tamil-organisations-despite-government-change

economic resources belonging to or held by them. The list also reaffirmed the ban on 222 individuals allegedly linked to terrorism. [417]

In June 2024, the Sri Lankan government reimposed its ban on fifteen organisations and 210 individuals barring them from entering or operating in the country and claiming that they are engaging in "terrorism related activities".[418] Organisations barred include the Tamil Coordinating Committee (TCC), the Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam (TGTE), the National Council of Canadian Tamils (NCCT) and the Tamil Youth Organization (TYO). These organisations continue to function lawfully in many countries around the world, including the United States, United Kingdom and Canada. A ban could make it a criminal offence for Sri Lankan citizens to maintain contact with these organisations or their members and stifle links between these groups and individuals in Sri Lanka. [419]

[417] **Sri Lanka keeps 'terrorism' ban on Tamil diaspora organisations and individuals.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, Jun 2, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-updates-ban-tamil-organisations-and-individuals-despite-government-change

[418] **Sri Lanka reimposes ban on Tamil diaspora organisations.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 10 June 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-reimposes-ban-tamil-diaspora-organisations

[419] **Sri Lanka reimposes ban on Tamil diaspora organisations.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 10 June 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-reimposes-ban-tamil-diaspora-organisations

Election violence and intimidation

November 2019 Presidential Election

Sources reporting on the election and post-election period observed that Tamils and Muslims, were intimidated, prevented from voting or faced reprisals for not voting for Gotabaya Rajapaksa. [420] [421]

In the lead-up to the November 2019 Presidential Election**,** Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal - Tamil Peoples Liberation Tigers (TMVP), declared its support for Sri Lanka Podujana Permuna (SLPP) candidate Gotabaya Rajapaksa. [422] TMVP is a paramilitary political party led by Pillayan (alias Sivanesathurai Chandrakanthan), who at the time of the election was in remand over the 2005 murder of Tamil National Alliance parliamentarian Joseph Pararajasingham. The paramilitary leader broke away from the LTTE with Karuna in 2004, and since then has been accused of committing executions and other rights abuses with the support of the Sri Lankan state.[423] The TMVP was originally the political wing of the armed faction earlier known as the Karuna group. It enjoyed the strong backing of the government of President Mahinda Rajapaksa. The TMVP is still actively involved in serious human rights abuses.[424] [425]

The European Union Election Observation Mission received complaints from the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), that intimidation of voters and inciting of violence was planned in the Batticaloa District in Eastern Province using members of organisations under the leadership of Karuna Amman and Pillayan. Similar incidents were reported in Batticaloa and Ampara districts during the previous elections. [426]

On 10th of November 2019 the Batticaloa home of a supporter of candidate Sajith Premadasa was attacked with a petrol bomb. Members of the Pillayan paramilitary group are alleged to have carried out the attack.[427]

---

[420] **ACLED. Regional Overview South Asia 10-16 November 2019.** https://acleddata.com/2019/11/19/regional-overview-south-asia-10-16-november-2019/

[421] **ACLED. Regional Overview South Asia 17-23 November 2019.** https://acleddata.com/2019/11/26/regional-overview-south-asia-17-23-november-2019/

[422] **'TMVP to back Gotabaya'.** *Sunday Observer* (online, 13 October 2019) http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2019/10/13/news/tmvp-back-gotabaya

[423] **'Pro-Rajapaksa paramilitary leader 'assured Sri Lankan minister post'.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 1 August 2020) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/pro-rajapaksa-paramilitary-leader-%E2%80%98assured-sri-lankan-minister-post%E2%80%99

[424] **Sri Lanka: Human Rights Situation Deteriorating in the East -Armed Faction Is Killing, Kidnapping Civilians.** *Human Rights Watch* (online, 24 November 2008) https://www.hrw.org/news/2008/11/24/sri-lanka-human-rights-situation-deteriorating-east

[425] **TMVP General Secretary arrested for threatening witnesses in double murder case.** *ColomboPage* (online, 12 November 2020) http://www.colombopage.com/archive_20B/Nov12_1605205026CH.php

[426] **'Karuna and Pillayan planning election violence in the East, SLMC leader informs EU Election Monitoring Team'.** *ColomboPage* (online, 31 October 2019) http://www.colombopage.com/archive_19B/Oct31_1572505075CH.php

[427] **'Petrol bombs flung at home of Sajith supporter in Batticaloa'.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 14 November 2019) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/petrol-bombs-flung-home-sajith-supporter-batticaloa

An attack on a convoy of internally displaced Muslims heading to Northern Province to cast their ballots in Mannar District where the Elections Commission had encouraged them to register as voters, raised concerns of a coordinated effort to disenfranchise the minority group.[428]

On 3 November 2019 in Mullaitivu, Northern Province, a prominent member of the youth wing of Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi (ITAK), the largest party of the Tamil National Alliance, was summoned for questioning in Colombo by the Terrorism Investigation Division. He was the fourth Mullaitivu -based individual to be summoned in recent weeks.[429]

Gotabaya Rajapaksa won the election. While sweeping Sinhala votes in the South, Rajapaksa averaged less than 18% of the vote in the Tamil homeland of the North-East. [430]

On 30th November 2019, Vavuniya Citizens Committee leader and Coordinator of the Vavuniya families of the disappeared K. Rajkumar, was brutally attacked several times by paramilitary Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) supporters after a protest held to show their concerns regarding its leader Douglas Devananda.[431] Douglas Devananda, a current Sri Lankan cabinet minister, is notorious in the Northern Province for his role in abductions and disappearances during and after the armed conflict.[432] The EPDP, a government backed paramilitary organisation, has been accused of a litany of crimes including assassinations, abductions, running prostitution rings and extortion.[433] [434]

---

[428] **Associated Press, 'Attack probed as Sri Lankans choose next leader'.** *North West Arkansas Democrat Gazette* (online, 17 November 2019) https://www.nwaonline.com/news/2019/nov/17/attack-probed-as-sri-lankans-choose-nex/

[429] '**ITAK activist latest in spate of summons by terrorism division as Maaveerar Naal approaches'.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 3 November 2019) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/itak-activist-latest-spate-summons-terrorism-division-maaveerar-naal-approaches

[430] '**Hate speech flourishes online as Gotabaya victory declared'**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, 17 November 2019) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/hate-speech-flourishes-online-gotabaya-victory-declared

[431] '**Paramilitary members attack families of disappeared representative'.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 1 January 2020) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/paramilitary-members-attack-families-disappeared-representative

[432] **'Families of disappeared protest demanding EPDP leader arrest'.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 3 January 2020) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/families-disappeared-protest-demanding-epdp-leader-arrest

[433] **'Vavuniya locals protest EPDP MP's 'demeaning' comment'.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 17 September 2020) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/vavuniya-locals-protest-epdp-mp%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%98demeaning%E2%80%99-comment

[434] **Abductions, murders and prostitution rings – The story of Douglas Devananda, who is still a Sri Lankan minister**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, 18 April 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/abductions-murders-and-prostitution-rings-story-douglas-devananda-who-still-sri-lankan

August 2020 General Parliamentary Election

In June 2020, Sri Lanka's opposition party, the Samagi Jana Balavegaya, accused the government's intelligence agencies of collecting data on civilians as part of a larger surveillance project, that would see military intelligence officers in every polling station across the island at the upcoming parliamentary elections.[435]

Eleven international human rights organisations cautioned the Sri Lankan government in a statement demanding that they end targeted detention and the intimidations of lawyers, activists, human rights defenders, and journalists in Sri Lanka.
According to the joint statement:

"A campaign of fear has intensified since the 2019 presidential election and has cast a shadow over the 2020 parliamentary election campaign" [436]

UN Special Rapporteur Clément N. Voule expressed repeated concern at rapid changes that had taken place in Sri Lanka since the 2019 presidential elections, citing ethnic discrimination, militarisation, and intimidation of civil society in an address to the UN Human Rights Council.

"I am concerned about the fate of hard-fought gains in relation to civic space and the rule of law, including in the run up to the 5 August parliamentary elections." [437]
A Northern Province TNA candidate expressed fear to the Election Commission that Sri Lanka's militarisation may hinder free voting in the elections.[438]

Sri Lankan Military intimidated former Northern Province Chief Minister Justice Wigneswaran ahead of the Parliamentary Elections.[439]

Socialist Equality Party (SEP) candidates for the Jaffna district experienced military harassment on several occasions.[440] Leaders of independent groups contesting the general election also complained about military harassment.[441]

---

[435] **'Sri Lankan opposition warns of intelligence officers at polling stations as part of state surveillance'.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 09 June 2020) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-opposition-warns-intelligence-officers-polling-stations-part-state-surveillance

[436] **''Human rights under attack' in Sri Lanka warn multiple NGOs'**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, 31 July 2020) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/human-rights-under-attack-sri-lanka-warn-multiple-ngos

[437] **''Concern, concern, concern' – UN Special Rapporteur says Sri Lanka has 'rapidly changed''.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 10 July 2020) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/%E2%80%98concern-concern-concern%E2%80%99-%E2%80%93-un-special-rapporteur-says-sri-lanka-has-%E2%80%98rapidly-changed%E2%80%99

[438] **'TNA candidate fears Sri Lanka's militarisation may hinder free voting in elections.'** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 26 June 2020) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tna-candidate-fears-sri-lanka%E2%80%99s-miltiarisation-may-hinder-free-voting-elections

[439] Justice C.V.Wigneswaran, Thamizh Makkal Thesiya Kootani, **'Sri Lankan Military Intimidates Former Northern Province Chief Minister Justice Wigneswaran Ahead of Polls'.** Einpresswire (online, 31 July 2020) https://www.einpresswire.com/article/522977070/sri-lankan-military-intimidates-former-northern-province-chief-minister-justice-wigneswaran-ahead-of-polls

[440] **'Growing demands that Sri Lankan defence secretary end the military harassment of SEP candidates'.** *World Socialist Web Site* (online, 28 July 2020) https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/07/28/sril-j28.html

A Tamil journalist in Kilinochchi was threatened by a local politician with links to a former paramilitary MP. The council member was reported to be a member of a political party led by M Chandrakumar, a former parliamentarian who served under the paramilitary Eelam People's Democratic Party.[442]

Sri Lanka election monitoring organisation, People's Action for Free and Fair election (PAFFREL) received across the country 1,469 complaints of violations of election laws and other laws related to the general election by July 24th, according to the PAFFREL Executive Director Rohana Hettiarachchi. Out of the total, 58 incidents of serious violence had been reported and 876 complaints had been received regarding illegal propaganda activities. In addition, PAFFREL received 24 complaints of assaults during political activities. Among them were 9 serious assaults, six within the same party and nine disputes between the opposition parties.[443]

In the lead up to the August 2020 General Parliamentary Election, Sri Lanka election monitor, Campaign for Free and Fair Elections (CaFFE) warned that certain parts of Digamadulla district in the Eastern Province could be a hotspot for election violence. Three hotspots were identified in the district - Pottuvil, Sainthamaruthu and Akkaraipattu. [444]

Paramilitary organisations and Sri Lankan military intelligence had pursued a campaign of intimidation and harassment against party members of Tamil National People's Front (TNPF) contesting in the Eastern province, said party leader Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam.

"In Amparai, 3 of our candidates are on the verge of withdrawing due to ferocious threats and harassment from the Karuna group," he said. *"In Batticaloa, one of our candidates is under threat from Pillayan group for the last 3 years."* [445]

A week after the General Parliamentary Election the TNPF Amparai District candidate was attacked with swords by men from the paramilitary Karuna group and admitted to hospital with serious injuries.[446]

---

[441] **'As support widens for SEP defence campaign, Sri Lanka army commander says allegations of military harassment of northern election candidates are "false"'**. *World Socialist Web Site* (online, 16 July 2020) https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/07/16/sldc-j16.html

[442] **'Tamil journalist threatened by paramilitary-linked local politician',** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 25 July 2020) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamil-journalist-threatened-paramilitary-linked-local-politician

[443] **'Election monitor receives 1469 complaints regarding election law violations'** ***C****olomboPage* (online, July 26 2020) http://www.colombopage.com/archive_20B/Jul26_1595737864CH.php

[444]**'Digamadulla already a hotspot for election violence – CaFFE'**, *ColomboPage* (online, 7 July 2020) http://www.colombopage.com/archive_20B/Jul07_1594144783CH.php

[445] **''Candidates on the verge of withdrawing due to ferocious threats' – TNPF',** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 30 July 2020) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/%E2%80%98candidates-verge-withdrawing-due-ferocious-threats%E2%80%99-%E2%80%93-tnpf

[446] **'Former TNPF candidate seriously injured by paramilitary sword attack',** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 11 August 2020) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/former-tnpf-candidate-seriously-injured-paramilitary-sword-attack

Karuna Amman (alias Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan), was a close ally of the Rajapaksa regime. He was accused of a litany of crimes including kidnappings, extortion, and executions, many of which took place with the complicity of Rajapaksa's government, after Karuna had defected from the LTTE.[447] [448]

Karuna contested the Parliamentary Election as a candidate for the Tamil United Freedom Front (TUFF) in Kalmunai. Although unsuccessful, he split the Tamil vote in Digamudulla electoral district, with the TNA losing its Tamil representation in this area. Karuna was later appointed the District Coordinator of Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa for Ampara and Batticaloa.[449]

llankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK) is the main party in the Tamil National Alliance. Thavarasa Kalaiarasan, a candidate for ITAK in Kalmunai, was unsuccessful at the Parliamentary General Election, but later nominated to parliament as a TNA National List MP. [450]

Leader of the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pullikal (TMVP), Sivanesathurai Chandrakanthan (Santhirakanthan) alias Pillayan, despite being held in remand for the murder of a TNA politician in 2005, was elected to Parliament. Pillayan is a paramilitary leader accused of committing executions and other human rights abuses with the support of the Sri Lankan state. A firm supporter of the Rajapaksa regime, he contested in the parliamentary elections as part of the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal Party (TMVP) and attained the most votes in Batticaloa with over 54,000 votes. Tamil observers have commented that his party exploited tensions between Tamils and Muslims in the East as part of election campaigning. Pillayan had been in remand custody for the assassination of Pararajasingham since October 2015.[451]

In September 2020, President Rajapaksa appointed Pillayan as Co-Chairperson of the Batticaloa District Coordinating Committee (DDC) charged with coordinating, implementing, and monitoring all development activities of state institutions and NGOs in the district.[452]

---

[447] **Mahinda Rajapaksa warns against 'minor distractions' of Karuna and urges focus on 'foreign conspirators'.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 30 June 2020) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/mahinda-rajapaksa-warns-against-minor-distractions-karuna-and-urges-focus-foreign

[448] **''Accountability should apply to everyone' says UN in call to investigate Karuna',** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 26 June 2020) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/accountability-should-apply-everyone-says-un-call-investigate-karuna

[449] **Karuna Amman appointed district coordinator of Prime Minister**. *The Island Online* (online, 15 October 2020) https://island.lk/karuna-amman-appointed-district-coordinator-of-prime-minister/

[450] **'Tamil parties appoint National List MP's',** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 10 August 2020) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamil-parties-appoint-national-list-mps

[451] **'Murder-accused paramilitary leader permitted to attend parliament sessions',** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 19 August 2020) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/murder-accused-paramilitary-leader-permitted-attend-parliament-sessions

[452] **2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Sri Lanka. Section C. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, Or Degrading Treatment Or Punishment.** US Department of State. March 30, 2021. https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/sri-lanka/

In January 2021, the charges against Pillayan, at that time a sitting MP and close political ally of the Rajapaksa's SLPP, were dropped by the Attorney General.[453]

2024 Election Violence and Intimidation

September 2024 Presidential Election

In the lead up to the September 2024 Presidential Election, Sri Lankan Minister, Manusha Nanayakkara, warned of emerging racism in the island nation targeting ethnic minorities. Sri Lankan politicians have historically used racism to divide the country and win elections with the help of their own ethnicities and religious groups. [454]

During April to June 2024, Sri Lanka's Terrorism Investigation Division (TID) summoned at least seven Tamil political activists in the North-East for questioning. In June 2024, Tamil parliamentarian, ITAK leader Sivagnanam Shritharan, tabled a letter in Parliament addressed to Sri Lanka's President Ranil Wickremesinghe. The letter warned of a systematic plan to disrupt the daily lives of Tamils through targeted investigations and intimidations by the security forces, particularly focusing on political leaders in the Tamil homeland. In his letter, the parliamentarian provided details of seven Tamil individuals who had been summoned by the TID within the past three months. Shritharan called for an end to the ongoing police harassment against Tamil political activists. [455]

In June 2024, the former chairman of the Batticaloa district youth wing of Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi (ITAK), Lohitharaja Deepakaran, and the coordinator of the Tamil Youth People's Movement, Jeevarathinam Thaveswaran were summoned for questioning by the Terrorism Investigation Division in Batticaloa. Thaveswaran believed this action was politically motivated, especially in light of his movement's support for a Tamil public candidate in the upcoming Sri Lankan presidential election. [456]

In July 2024, CIVICUS Monitor reported:

In recent months, human rights groups have documented a clampdown on commemorations around the anniversary of the end of the civil war, Tamil activists summoned by the anti-terrorism division and how the anti-terror law has been used to target activists, critics and minorities. There are also concerns about a repressive NGO law that has been proposed that could restrict freedoms. The authorities have restricted gathering and protests, including

[453] **Sri Lankan government to drop murder case of senior Tamil politician.** *Outlook India. The News Scroll* (online, 11 January 2021). https://www.outlookindia.com/newsscroll/sri-lankan-government-to-drop-murder-case-of-senior-tamil-politician/2008622

[454] **Sri Lanka minister warns of emerging racism ahead of elections**. *Economy Next* (online, 24th November 2023. https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-minister-warns-of-emerging-racism-ahead-of-elections-141305/

[455] **Sri Lanka's TID summons more Tamil activists.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 13 June 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-s-tid-summons-more-tamil-activists

[456] **Sri Lanka's TID summons more Tamil activists.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 13 June 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-s-tid-summons-more-tamil-activists

arresting worshippers around a festival and brutally attacking thousands of protesting teachers. A report showed the unlawful use of weapons in the policing of protests. Sri Landa's press freedom ranking has plunged, and journalists continue to face arrest and prosecutions. [457]

In August 2024, Sri Lankan police, in Amparai, Eastern Province, obstructed the Tamil National People's Front's (TNPF) presidential election boycott campaign which urged Tamils to boycott the presidential election. The TNPF submitted a written complaint to Sri Lanka's Human Rights Council.[458] TNPF MP Selvarajah Kajendren and other members of the TNPF had been repeatedly harassed by Sri Lankan security forces. [459]

More than 200 of Sri Lanka's parliamentarians were armed with two repeater shotguns each, issued in September 2024 by the Defence Ministry. [460]

A spike in election-related violence occurred as the election drew closer according to data released by Election monitors People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL), the Sri Lankan Elections Commission and Sri Lankan media outlets. This included 58 acts of violence. [461]

In October 2024, P. Ariyanenthiran, who contested Sri Lanka's recent presidential elections as the Tamil 'common candidate' was summoned by Sri Lanka's Terrorism Investigation Division (TID), alongside supporters of his campaign, for interrogation by the authorities. The interrogations focused on the sources of Ariyanenthiran's campaign financing, including questions about how and from where the funds were received. [462]

November 2024 General Election

In October 2024, Sri Lankan police officers visited and questioned one of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) candidates who was running for northern Jaffna district in the November 14, 2024, parliamentary elections. The two weeks of ongoing harassment began one day after the election nominations closed, when

[457] **Sri Lanka: Authorities continue to target activists, stifle protests and silence journalists, as elections draw near. 31st July 2024.** https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/sri-lanka-authorities-continue-to-target-activists-stifle-protests-and-silence-journalists-as-elections-draw-near/

[458] **Sri Lankan police obstruct Tamil election boycott campaign.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 29th August 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-police-obstruct-tamil-election-boycott-campaign

[459] **Sri Lankan police release TNPF MP but claim boycott campaign is 'illegal'.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 14 September 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-police-release-tnpf-mp-claim-boycott-campaign-illegal

[460] **Over 200 Sri Lankan MPs to be given two shotguns each.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 11 September 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/over-200-sri-lankan-mps-be-given-two-shotguns-each

[461] **Election violence rises in Sri Lanka as polls draw closer.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 10 September 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/election-violence-rises-sri-lanka-polls-draw-closer

[462] **Ariyanenthiran and supporters summoned by Sri Lanka's TID.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 22 October 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/ariyanenthiran-and-supporters-summoned-sri-lankas-tid

two police officers in civilian clothes visited the home of SEP Jaffna district candidate Rasarathinam Thirugnanavel. [463]

In November 2024, the Election Commission reported that there were 11 incidents of violence, and 1,104 violations related to election campaigning across the country. The People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL) documented a total of 15 incidents of violence, and 1,011 significant violations including illegal election propaganda, violation of election laws, abuse of state power, resources and employees, and election-campaigning that harassed the general public. [464] [465]

The Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) reported that the ability of citizens to exercise their voting rights in an unfettered manner in the Northern and Eastern Province remained a cause for concern. CMEV documented serious violations of election law in the Kalkudah Electoral Division of Batticaloa District where polling cards were illegally obtained from post offices, thereby depriving the legitimate voters of their right to vote. Other minority and marginalized groups also expressed their apprehension about the mainly majoritarian focus of the election campaign.[466]

The Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) reported concern from ANFREL observers that there were polling stations with armed police officers stationed inside. This resulted in a situation where police officers were in close proximity to voters, with the potential for intimidation of voters. [467]

The Campaign for Free and Fair Elections [CaFFE] reported that two incidents of violence took place in Kalmunai in the Digamadulla district. CaFFE had identified Kalmunai as a hot spot where violence could occur. CaFFE observers reported that one person was admitted to the Ashraf Memorial hospital as a result of the clash. [468]

---

[463] **Sri Lankan SEP demands an end to the illegal state harassment of its election candidates in the North.** *World Socialist Website* (online, 25th October 2024). https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2024/10/25/wctp-o25.html

[464] **11 incidents of violence and 1104 violations so far in runup to General Elections.** *Sunday Times* (online, November 3rd 2024). https://www.sundaytimes.lk/241103/news/11-incidents-of-violence-and-1104-violations-so-far-in-runup-to-general-elections-576148.html

[465] **1st Interim Report - Parliamentary Election 2024. PAFFREL. 31October 2024.** https://www.paffrel.com/elections/elections-results-and-reports/media-releases/1st-interim-report-pg-election-2024

[466] P**arliamentary Election 2024: Overview Report on the Campaign Period (11 Oct – 13 Nov 2024). CMEV. 14 November 2024.** https://cmev.org/2024/11/14/parliamentary-election-2024-overview-report-on-the-campaign-period-11-oct-13-nov-2024/

[467] 2024 **Sri Lanka Parliamentary Elections: Peaceful and Orderly Process Observed amid projected Low Voter Turnout, Prevailing Accessibility Challenges, and Ballot Secrecy Concerns. ANFREL. 14 November 2024.** https://anfrel.org/2024-sri-lanka-parliamentary-elections-peaceful-and-orderly-process-observed-amid-projected-low-voter-turnout-prevailing-accessibility-challenges-and-ballot-secrecy-concerns/

[468] **Parliamentary poll peaceful except for two incidents of violence in Kalmunai.** *CaFFE* (online, 16 November 2024). https://island.lk/parliamentary-poll-peaceful-except-for-two-incidents-of-violence-in-kalmunai-caffe/

The Ilankai Thamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK) won three seats in Batticaloa District, Eastern Province, National Peoples Party (NPP) 1 seat and Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) 1 seat. The Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP) party led by paramilitary leader Pillayan did not secure a seat in Batticaloa District. [469]

May 2025 Local Government Elections

In May 2025, Local Government Elections were held in Sri Lanka. Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi (ITAK), a Tamil political party, contested in 58 local councils across the North-East and secured administrative control in 40 of them, revealing a significant shift in voter sentiment across the Tamil homeland, with the ruling National People's Power (NPP) coalition losing ground and Tamil nationalist parties making a more decisive comeback in the North-East. [470] The results across the North-East reflect a broader disillusionment with the NPP, particularly among Tamil voters who feel the government has failed to deliver on promises of justice, accountability, and devolution. [471]

In May 2025, the Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) filed a formal complaint with Sri Lanka's Election Commission (EC), accusing Sri Lankan Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya of violating election laws by conducting National People's Power (NPP) campaign meetings inside Hindu temples in the Jaffna District. These incidents have raised serious concerns about the NPP government's approach to electoral integrity and the impartial enforcement of campaign conduct, particularly in the Tamil North-East. [472]

In May 2025, a journalist covering the local government elections in Jaffna was assaulted and threatened by supporters of the National People's Power (NPP) party, raising renewed concerns about media freedom and election-related violence in the North-East. [473]

In May 2025, a candidate, Kanesapillai Balachandran, representing the Tamil People's Alliance (TPA) was attacked and assaulted in Jaffna. [474]

---

[469] **Batticaloa District final result: ITAK wins 3 seats.** *Adaderana* (online, November 15, 2024). https://www.adaderana.lk/news.php?nid=103497

[470] **Tamil nationalism triumphs over 'Anura Wave' – Sumanthiran**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, 7 May, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sumanthiran-tamil-nationalism-triumphs-over-anura-wave-narrative

[471] **Tamil nationalist parties surge in local polls as NPP loses votes in North-East.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 7 May, 2025.) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamil-nationalist-parties-surge-local-polls-npp-loses-votes-north-east

[472] **Sri Lankan PM accused of defying election laws with temple campaign meetings in Jaffna.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 4 May, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/worship-warfare-pm-accused-turning-temples-campaign-arenas

[473] **Journalist and candidate assaulted during local polls in Jaffna.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 6 May, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/journalist-and-candidate-assaulted-during-local-polls-jaffna

[474] Ibid.

In March 2025, Former Deputy Minister Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan, known as Karuna Amman, and former State Minister Sivanesathurai Chandrakanthan, known as Pillayan, joined the newly formed Eastern Tamil Alliance to focus on contesting the Local Government election polls in the Eastern Province. [475] Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan, formerly the leader of the pro-government paramilitary Karuna Group, has been implicated in serious human rights violations against Tamils. In March 2025 the UK Government announced sanctions against Karuna. [476] Pillayan, a paramilitary leader of the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP), has been accused of committing executions and other human rights abuses with the support of the Sri Lankan state. [477] In April 2025, Pillayan, was arrested by the Criminal Investigations Department, with reports suggesting that this arrest was in connection with the enforced disappearance of a university vice-chancellor in the Eastern Province in 2006. [478]

Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA)

Numerous Human Rights reports have cited widespread and systemic brutal abuse, torture, and ill-treatment of Sri Lankan Tamil people arbitrarily detained, or arrested under the notorious Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA).
The PTA is one of the main tools used to perpetrate human rights violations in Sri Lanka. Suspects can be placed in prolonged detention – without charge and without being produced before a judge.[479]

In June 2025, at the 59th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Sri Lanka Core Group reiterated concern over the continued use of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), despite repeated pledges by the Sri Lankan Government to repeal the controversial legislation. The PTA has long been criticised by Tamil civil society, international human rights groups, and UN experts for facilitating arbitrary detention and systemic abuse. [480]

---

[475] **Karuna Amman and Pillayan join ahead of LG polls.** *Newswire* (online, March 22, 2025). https://www.newswire.lk/2025/03/22/karuna-amman-and-pillayan-join-ahead-of-lg-polls/

[476] **BREAKING - UK sanctions Sri Lankan war criminals**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, March 24, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/breaking-uk-sanctions-sri-lankan-war-criminals

[477] **19 years on, no justice for assassinated Tamil MP.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 25 December 2024). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/19-years-no-justice-assassinated-tamil-mp

[478] **Pillayan arrested over 'abduction and disappearance' says Sri Lankan police.** *Tamil Guardian* (online 9 April, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/pillayan-arrested-abduction-and-disappearance-says-sri-lankan-police

[479] Thyagi Ruwanpathirana**. On Hejaaz Hizbullah: The latest victim of Sri Lanka's draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act**. *Amnesty International,* 15 July 2020. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/07/sri-lanka-on-hejaaz-hizbullah-and-the-prevention-of-terrorism-act/

[480] **UN Human Rights Council 59: Sri Lanka Core Group statement for the Interactive Dialogue on the High Commissioner's Annual Report. 17 June, 2025.** https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/un-human-rights-council-59-sri-lanka-core-group-statement-for-the-interactive-dialogue-on-the-high-commissioners-annual-report

In June 2025, the coordinator of Voice for the Voiceless, announced that an urgent appeal had been made to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, calling for the immediate release of Tamil political prisoners. [481]

In May 2025, in a joint appeal, over 240 civil society actors, including activists, trade unions, lawyers, clergy, academics, and former detainees, signed a letter demanding the immediate and unconditional repeal of Sri Lanka's controversial Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). [482]

In February 2025, a petition with 18,000 signatures was submitted to Sri Lankan president Anura Kumara Dissanayake by the Poraalihal Welfare Association, calling for the immediate release of Tamil political prisoners detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). The large-scale petition saw thousands of individuals, including families of detainees, activists, and concerned citizens, join the call for the release of those imprisoned under a law that has long been condemned by human rights organisations. Despite years of protests and demands, successive Sri Lankan governments have failed to act. The PTA remains in place, continuing to be used as a tool to detain Tamils arbitrarily, often without charge or trial. [483]

In August 2024, the Comprehensive Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Situation in Sri Lanka stated:

"The Government reported that in 2023 and 2024, four persons were arrested under the PTA, while five persons had been issued detention orders.

The HRCSL, however, reported that the authorities notified it of 46 cases of arrests and detentions under the PTA between January 2023 and April 2024. OHCHR also received reports of at least 12 cases in which the PTA was used to detain persons, – primarily those participating or involved in organization of memorialization activities, – for a short period and without adequate acknowledgment of their deprivation of liberty, who were then released on bail or discharged weeks or months later." [484]

In July 2024, Human Rights Watch reported that Sri Lankan authorities continue to use the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) to target perceived opponents and minority communities without credible evidence to support the allegations despite repeated pledges to end the practice. While some victims have suffered

---

[481] **Calls for UN to expedite release of Tamil political prisoners.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, June 27, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/call-un-expedite-release-tamil-political-prisoners

[482] **Over 240 civil society groups call for immediate repeal of Sri Lanka's PTA**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, 29 May, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/over-240-civil-society-groups-call-immediate-repeal-sri-lankas-pta

[483] **18,000 signatures submitted to Sri Lankan president demanding release of Tamil political prisoners.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 26 February 2025) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-president-faces-pressure-free-detainees-petition-gains-momentum

[484] **A/HRC/57/19: Situation of human rights in Sri Lanka - Comprehensive report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights - Advance unedited version. Published 22 August 2024 [para. 15].** https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/ahrc5719-situation-human-rights-sri-lanka-comprehensive-report-united-nations

years of arbitrary detention and torture, others are persecuted even after the case against them is dropped. [485]

In December 2023, Human Rights Watch reported that Sri Lankan authorities had detained nine ethnic Tamils under the country's abusive counterterrorism law for commemorating those who died in the 1983-2009 civil war. Human Rights Watch stated that the Sri Lankan Government administration has also used the PTA to restrict criticism of government management of the economy and other policies. Activists say that they fear being arrested under the PTA for speaking out and that the government is constraining civil society organizations' access to funding, particularly donations from abroad, under the guise of "countering terrorist financing. [486]

In June 2023, a former political prisoner, Selvanayagam Ananthavarnan, was summoned by Sri Lanka's Terrorism Investigation Department (TID) to submit a statement about an undisclosed TID investigation. Political prisoners often continue to face various forms of harassment and intimidation from the Sri Lanka's police and military even after they have been released.[487]

According to human rights groups, the controversial Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) has been used against hundreds of political dissenters in Sri Lanka, often from the ethnic Tamil or minority Muslim community. It has been reported that prisoners arrested under the Act, irrespective of gender, have undergone humiliation and torture inside prison. Even after their release, those targeted under the PTA continue to face structural surveillance by the state apparatus and face difficulties in finding employment. Over 200 Tamil political prisoners are currently incarcerated in different prisons and detention centers in Sri Lanka, according to Counter Currents. [488]

The March 2023 Report on Sri Lanka by the UN Human Rights Committee stated:

'The Committee remains concerned that the [Prevention of Terrorism] Act continues to permit prolonged pretrial detention, up to 12 months, without charge, contains a broad definition of terrorism, and is used to legitimize the targeting of minorities, particularly Muslims and Tamils, government critics and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals, and to extract confessions through torture. It is also concerned about reports of deaths in custody of individuals detained under the Act with impunity.' [489]

---

[485] **Sri Lanka: False Terrorism Cases Enable Repression. Politically Motivated Detentions, Surveillance, Threats.** *Human Rights Watch* (online, 17th July 2024). https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/07/17/sri-lanka-false-terrorism-cases-enable-repression

[486] **Sri Lanka: Tamils Detained for Commemorating War Dead. 9 Held Under Abusive Prevention of Terrorism Act**. *Human Rights Watch* (online, 6th December 2023). https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/06/sri-lanka-tamils-detained-commemorating-war-dead

[487] **Former Tamil political prisoner summoned by TID**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, 05 June 2023). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/former-tamil-political-prisoner-summoned-tid

[488] **Three Tamil political prisoners freed in Sri Lanka after 14 years of incarceration**. *Peoples Dispatch* (online, 8th April 2023). https://peoplesdispatch.org/2023/04/08/three-tamil-political-prisoners-freed-in-sri-lanka-after-14-years-of-incarceration/

[489] **UN Human Rights Committee. Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Sri Lanka. 24th March 2023.** [point 16 Counter-terrorism measures] https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2FC%2FLKA%2FCO%2F6&Lang=en

'Amendments to the Prevention of Terrorism Act failed to address key human rights concerns, and Muslims and Tamils continued to be targeted under the Act,' stated Amnesty International in its 2022/2023 report on Human Rights in Sri Lanka. [490]

In August 2022, Human Rights Watch called on Sri Lankan president Ranil Wickremesinghe to immediately end the use of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) which continues to be used by his government to detain anti-government protesters.[491]

Tamil Guardian reported in May 2022, that a Tamil youth who was arrested by Sri Lankan authorities under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) in 2009 and tortured to produce a false confession, was finally, 13 years later, acquitted of all charges. [492]

In March 2022, the High Commissioner reiterated her call for the Government to apply a moratorium on the use of the Act until it is replaced by legislation that fully complies with the country's international human rights obligations. [493]

The International Commission of Jurists issued a statement in February 2022 stating:

"The PTA as it stands allows for arbitrary and indefinite deprivation of liberty of any individual, group of individuals, association, organisation or body of persons within or outside Sri Lanka suspected of a wide range of ill-defined activities that are considered unlawful under this Act. These amendments do not in any way address the fundamental violation, as they still allow for persons to be deprived of liberty for an entire year without being given the opportunity to be heard before a court of law. The PTA has deprived scores of victims of their right to liberty for months if not years without charge or trial and has been instrumental in the torture and ill-treatment of many under arbitrary and indefinite detention" [494]

In February 2022, Human Rights Watch released a report titled "*In a Legal Black Hole" Sri Lanka's Failure to Reform the Prevention of Terrorism Act.* [495]

---

[490] **Amnesty International Report 2022/2023. The State of the World's Human Rights. SRI LANKA 2022. Amnesty International. March 2023**. https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/asia-and-the-pacific/south-asia/sri-lanka/report-sri-lanka/

[491] **'End Use of Terrorism Law Against Protesters'.** *Human Rights Watch* (online, 31 August 2022). https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/08/31/sri-lanka-end-use-terrorism-law-against-protesters

[492] **Arrested, tortured and finally acquitted after 13 years.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 25 May 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/arrested-tortured-and-finally-acquitted-after-13-years

[493] **A/HRC/49/9: Situation of human rights in Sri Lanka – Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. 28 February–1 April 2022. [page 9, paragraph 43]** https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session49/Pages/ListReports.aspx

[494] **The Prevention of Terrorism Act cannot be reformed; it must be repealed. International Commission of Jurists**. February 1st, 2022. https://www.icj.org/sri-lanka-the-prevention-of-terrorism-act-cannot-be-reformed-it-must-be-repealed/

[495] **"In a Legal Black Hole" Sri Lanka's Failure to Reform the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Human Rights Watch. February 2022.** https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2022/02/srilanka0222_web.pdf

The report examined the PTA, noting how "twelve years since the end of the war the government is still targeting Tamils but also using the PTA against Muslims, particularly since 2019". The report noted that the government's proposed amendments to the PTA would still leave it falling far short of international standards. "If the amendments are adopted, the PTA would still not meet any of the five "necessary prerequisites" described by seven United Nations special rapporteurs in December 2021 to comply with international human rights standards," said HRW. [496]

In February 2022, former Human Rights Commissioner of Sri Lanka Ambika Satkunanathan, stated that "nearly all human rights deficient provisions in the PTA remain untouched" and that the Sri Lankan Government "has taken no action to repeal two provisions which facilitate torture." "They are sections 7(3), which allows the police to take the person out of prison to another place for interrogation even after the person has been remanded, and section 15A, which allows the Secretary Defence to decide on a place of detention after the person has been remanded to judicial custody, even following conviction." "The worst forms of torture have been recorded to have taken place when these two provisions were used," Satkunanathan stated. [497]

Sri Lanka's Centre for Policy Alternatives, on January 31st, 2022, stated that the government's proposed amendments to the PTA were "grossly inadequate" and that there needed to be an "immediate moratorium on the use of PTA until an acceptable law can be drafted". "Many of the aspects which require urgent reform as highlighted by legal scholars, civil society actors and even the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka have not been addressed in the Bill. In this light, the proposed amendment to the PTA appears to be more a token effort to address international pressure rather than a genuine and effective exercise to address ground realities and the abuses and violations brought about by the PTA." [498]

On January 27th, 2022, the Sri Lankan Government published a Bill to amend the PTA. However, the proposed amendments left the most often abused provisions of the law intact, and if enacted, would do little to bring the PTA into compliance with Sri Lanka's international human rights obligations. [499]

---

[496] **'In a Legal Black Hole' – Human Rights Watch slams Sri Lanka's PTA**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, 7 February 2022). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/legal-black-hole-human-rights-watch-slams-sri-lanka-s-pta

[497] **PTA reform: A farce in multiple acts. Ambika Satkunanathan.** *The Sunday Morning Sri Lanka* (online,5th February 2022). https://www.themorning.lk/pta-reform-a-farce-in-multiple-acts/

[498] **Commentary on Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) (Amendment) Bill 2022. Centre for Policy Alternatives. 31st January 2022**. https://www.cpalanka.org/commentary-on-prevention-of-terrorism-temporary-provisions-amendment-bill-2022/

[499] **"In a Legal Black Hole" Sri Lanka's Failure to Reform the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Human Rights Watch. February 2022.**
https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2022/02/srilanka0222_web.pdf

The Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission has recorded testimonies of persons who were subjected to severe torture when removed from judicial custody for interrogation.[500]

In October 2021, former Sri Lanka Human Rights Commissioner, Ambika Satkunanathan explained in a briefing to the US Congress Human Rights Commission, that due process is almost always violated during arrests under the PTA and that the PTA also allows the admission of a confession made to a Police officer above the rank of an Assistant Superintendent of Police as evidence during the trial.

"As a result, persons are tortured to obtain confessions. The burden of proving the confession was obtained under duress upon the accused person," she said.[501]

In August 2021, UN Special Rapporteurs called upon the Sri Lankan Government to rescind the Regulation which expanded upon previous concerns raised by the UN that remained unaddressed and are an additional set of rights-denying measures further undermining the protection of human rights in Sri Lanka. [502] [503]

In March 2021 'de-radicalization' regulations, which allowed for the arbitrary administrative detention of people for up to two years without trial, were introduced. The International Commission of Jurists expressed concern that the regulations could disproportionately target minority religious and ethnic communities and called for the regulations to be immediately withdrawn. [504]

The United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet expressed concern in her January 2021 Report to the UN Human Rights Council, that the Sri Lankan Government had continued to use the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), despite repeated calls over many years by United Nations human rights mechanisms to repeal it.[505]

---

[500] **Commission discusses Sri Lanka's PTA.** Colombo Gazette (online, 27th October 2021). https://colombogazette.com/2021/10/27/us-congress-human-rights-commission-discusses-sri-lankas-pta/

[501] **Commission discusses Sri Lanka's PTA.** *Colombo Gazette* (online, 27th October 2021). https://colombogazette.com/2021/10/27/us-congress-human-rights-commission-discusses-sri-lankas-pta/

[502] **UN Special Rapporteurs Communication Report to Sri Lankan Government. 9th August 2021.** https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownLoadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=26575

[503] **Sri Lanka's expanded PTA violates basic liberties warn UN experts.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 16 August 2021) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankas-expanded-pta-violates-basic-liberties-warn-un-experts

[504] **Sri Lanka: 'De-radicalization' regulations should be immediately withdrawn.** *ICJ* (online, 21st March 2021). https://www.icj.org/sri-lank-de-radicalization-regulations-should-be-immediately-withdrawn/#:~:text=Sri%20Lankan%20President%20Gotabaya%20Rajapaksa,notification%20on%2012%20March%2C%202021

[505] **Promotion reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka. Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Advance unedited version. Distr.: General. 27 January 2021** (pages 10 & 11). https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/LK/Sri_LankaReportJan2021.docx

"These incidents reflect the persistence of longstanding and endemic patterns of custodial deaths, use of torture and other ill-treatment, and extrajudicial killings by law enforcement officials with impunity.

OHCHR has also continued to receive credible allegations through well-known human rights organizations of abductions, torture and sexual violence by Sri Lankan security forces since the adoption of resolution 30/1, including in the past year, which need to be credibly investigated." [506]

"the failure to implement any vetting or comprehensive reforms in the security sector means that the State apparatus and some of its members credibly implicated in the alleged grave crimes and human rights violations remain in place." [507]

When Gotabaya Rajapaksa came to power in November 2019, his administration used the PTA to target perceived political opponents and members of the minority Tamil and Muslim communities. Authorities threatened the victims of past human rights violations, human rights activists and lawyers, journalists, and members of civil society groups under the guise of countering terrorism. A human rights activist working with the Tamil community based in the north of Sri Lanka said: *"They are using PTA to create fear among activists. When we talk to the families of the disappeared, they say they can be arrested at any time. Police are arresting people for posting pictures on Facebook. They can arrest you for anything."* [508]

The National Human Rights Commission in Sri Lanka emphasized in 2017 that torture in custody was widespread, systemic, institutionalised and formed a major priority in its work. [509]

UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and counter-terrorism Mr. Emmerson said in 2017:
"The Tamil community has borne the brunt of the State's well-oiled torture apparatus, as the law is used disproportionately against them. The use of torture is deeply ingrained in the security sector. I heard deeply disturbing, first-hand accounts of brutal torture. These included beatings with sticks, stress positions, asphyxiation using plastic bags drenched in kerosene, pulling out of fingernails, insertion of needles beneath the fingernails, various forms of water torture, suspension for several hours by the thumbs, and mutilation of the genitals." [510]

---

[506] **Promotion reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka. Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Advance unedited version. Distr.: General. 27 January 2021** (pages 10 & 11). https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/LK/Sri_LankaReportJan2021.docx

[507] **Promotion reconciliation, accountability& human rights in Sri Lanka. Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Advance unedited version. Distr.: General. 27 January 2021** (page 14, point 52). https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/LK/Sri_LankaReportJan2021.docx

[508] **"In a Legal Black Hole" Sri Lanka's Failure to Reform the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Human Rights Watch. February 2022.**
https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2022/02/srilanka0222_web.pdf

[509] **Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism, Addendum -Mission to Sri Lanka. July 2018. (page 8)**
https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/LK/Sri_LankaReportJuly2018.PDF

[510] **Sri Lanka routinely tortures security suspects amid stalled reform process, UN expert finds. OHCHR.** 18 July 2017.
https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21884&LangID=E

Returned Asylum Seekers

Returning people to a country in which they face harm is a breach of international law.

The UN Convention Against Torture to which Australia is a signatory, clearly states in Article 3 that:

1. No State Party shall expel, return ("refouler") or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture.

2. For the purpose of determining whether there are such grounds, the competent authorities shall take into account all relevant considerations including, where applicable, the existence in the State concerned of a consistent pattern of gross, flagrant or mass violations of human rights.[511]

In August 2024, the Comprehensive Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Situation in Sri Lanka stated:

"The High Commissioner recommends that the Human Rights Council and Member States, as applicable:
Review asylum measures with respect to Sri Lankan nationals to protect those facing reprisals and refrain from any refoulement in cases that present a real risk of torture or other serious human rights violations." [512]

In August 2025, a Tamil man was brutally assaulted when he was detained by the Sri Lankan navy as he returned to Sri Lanka by boat after living for 18 years in India, having fled Sri Lanka in 2007. The victim, Thangaiya David Balanthiran, was later hospitalized. The 40-year-old victim had a heart condition and was carrying the relevant medical reports, but these were ignored by the Navy. [513]

In June 2025, *Tamil Guardian* reported that the Supreme Court of India had issued a stay on the deportation of Bhaskaran Kumarasamy, an Eelam Tamil refugee and former member of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), recognizing the credible threat to his life if returned to Sri Lanka. The ruling has been hailed as a significant intervention in a case that has drawn international concern over refugee rights and post-war accountability in Sri Lanka. Kumarasamy's counsel stressed that returning him to Sri Lanka would amount to a death sentence, especially in light of the Sri Lankan state's long-standing record of targeting former LTTE members, even years after the war. [514]

---

[511] **Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. UN General Assembly. 10 December 1984**. https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3a94.html

[512] **A/HRC/57/19: Situation of human rights in Sri Lanka - Comprehensive report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights - Advance unedited version. Published 22 August 2024 [para. 68 (d)].** https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/ahrc5719-situation-human-rights-sri-lanka-comprehensive-report-united-nations

[513] **Tamil man brutally attacked by Sri Lankan Navy upon return to North-East.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 27 August 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/heart-patient-mullaitivu-brutally-beaten-navy-thalaimannar

[514] **Supreme Court of India halts deportation of former LTTE member.** *Tamil Guardian* (online,

In May 2025, Sri Lankan authorities arrested at Palay airport, Jaffna, a 75-year-old Tamil refugee. The elderly man, who had lived for decades in a refugee camp in Tamil Nadu (a state of India), had returned to Sri Lanka with all required documentation. Despite this, he was taken into custody by immigration officers and subsequently handed over to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), produced before the Mallakam Magistrate's Court and remanded, as CID officers objected to bail. The arrest of a legally cleared returnee has renewed fears over the safety and sincerity of Sri Lanka's repatriation process. and broader anxieties around the treatment of returning Tamil refugees. [515]

In August 2024, a man accused of being a former LTTE member, who had spent 18 years abroad, was detained at Bandaranaike International Airport (BIA) and interrogated by the Terrorism Investigation Division (TID). The TID accused him of aiding and abetting the bombing of a jeep and participating in LTTE activities. Authorities also alleged that he received military training to attack government forces. However, no substantial evidence was presented to substantiate these claims. This case underscores the difficulties that returning Tamils continue to face, even after the official defeat of the LTTE, often based on tenuous accusations. [516]

In March 2022 and in January 2021, the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, in her Report to the UN Human Rights Council, recommended:

"The Human Rights Council and Member States: Review asylum measures with respect to Sri Lankan nationals to protect those facing reprisals and avoid any refoulement in cases that present real risk of torture or other serious human rights violations." [517] [518]

Sri Lanka's Immigration and Emigration Department came under the direct control of the Defence Ministry in 2020.[519] Tightening of control by the Sri

---

June 27, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/supreme-court-india-halts-deportation-former-ltte-member

[515] **Sri Lanka arrests elderly UN-certified Tamil refugee at Palaly Airport.** *Tamil Guardian* (online 30 May, 2025). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/no-home-tamil-nadu-no-home-tamil-eelam-refugees-arrested-return-jaffna-0

[516] **Tamils returning from abroad still face arrest and harassment by Sri Lankan authorities**, *Tamil Guardian* (online, 01 September 2024.) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamils-returning-abroad-still-face-arrest-and-harassment-sri-lankan-authorities

[517] **A/HRC/49/9: Situation of human rights in Sri Lanka – Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. 28 February–1 April 2022. [page 15, paragraph 68(b)].** https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session49/Pages/ListReports.aspx

[518] **Promotion reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka. Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Advance unedited version. Distr.: General. 27 January 2021** (page 16, point 61g). https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/LK/Sri_LankaReportJan2021.docx

[519] **Sri Lanka's defence ministry assigned control of immigration.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 27th January 2020). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka%E2%80%99s-defence-ministry-assigned-control-immigration

Lankan Government places returned Tamil asylum seekers at particular risk of torture and human rights abuses at the hands of Sri Lanka's security forces. Many Tamils are still attempting to flee the island, but face deportation from other states around the world.[520]

In January 2021, Tamil Guardian reported that Australia had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Sri Lanka on the Return and Readmission of Persons which includes provisions for the return of asylum seekers who continue to face threats of torture and abuse in Sri Lanka.[521]

Departure pending visas have been issued by the Australian Government to at least nine Sri Lankan Tamil asylum seekers in the Geelong Region, said a refugee advocate. They must show their intent to depart to Sri Lanka.[522]

UK Upper Tribunal judges reject Australian DFAT country report used as a basis to determine asylum applications for Sri Lankan Tamils

In June 2021, the Australian Government DFAT Sri Lanka Country Information Report (Nov 2019), used extensively by Home Affairs and tribunals to judge Sri Lankan asylum seekers' claims, was criticised by an influential UK refugee tribunal, leading to calls for its retraction.[523] In a landmark immigration case[524] in the United Kingdom, "three Upper Tribunal judges were scathing in their rejection of Australian and UK country reports used as a basis to determine asylum applications for Sri Lankan Tamils. The consequences for many Sri Lankan applicants, particularly Tamil people seeking asylum in Australia has been the refusal of protection, based on what the UK court has said is unreliable information. The court also confirmed that if returned to Sri Lanka, they risk being subjected to torture, which the Tribunal says is endemic in the country."[525]

---

[520] **Sri Lanka's defence ministry assigned control of immigration.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 27th January 2020). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka%E2%80%99s-defence-ministry-assigned-control-immigration

[521] **Australia moves to return Tamil asylum seekers to Sri Lanka despite threats of torture.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 21 January 2021). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/australia-moves-return-tamil-asylum-seekers-sri-lanka-despite-threats-torture

[522] **Anecdotal evidence from a refugee advocate in Geelong. July 2022.**

[523] **A DFAT report used to judge Sri Lankan asylum seekers' claims has been criticised by an influential UK refugee tribunal, leading to calls for its retraction.** Source: AAP. *SBS News* (online, 3/6/21). https://www.sbs.com.au/news/dfat-urged-to-retract-inaccurate-report-saying-sri-lankans-face-low-torture-risk-following-uk-court-finding

[524] **Upper Tribunal (Immigration and Asylum Chamber) Appeal Numbers: PA/09978/2016 PA/13288/2018 issued on 27 May 2021. UK.** https://www.doughtystreet.co.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/KK%20%26%20RS%20%28Sri%20Lanka%29.pdf

[525] **Joint Media Release: Human rights groups demand suspension of reports on Sri Lanka to assess refugee applications following rejection by a UK court. Jun 3, 2021.** Australian Centre for International Justice. https://acij.org.au/joint-media-release-human-rights-groups-demand-suspension-of-reports-on-sri-lanka-to-assess-refugee-applications-following-rejection-by-a-uk-court/

The Upper Tribunal judges' decision referenced the inaccurate Australian Government DFAT Sri Lanka Country Information 2019 Report on Sri Lanka and found serious methodological shortcomings noting that: *"none of the sources are identified, there is no explanation as to how the information from these sources was obtained, and there is no annex containing, for example, records of any interviews… Indeed, it is unclear whether any formal interviews took place. The report does not provide direct quotes from any source. In light of these matters, it is difficult to gauge the reliability of the sources which have informed the "judgement and assessment" applied to them by the authors of the report."*[526]

The Upper Tribunal recognised that the 'authoritarian and paranoid' Government of Sri Lanka monitors proactively the activities of Tamils in the diaspora and as such if persons are returned to Sri Lanka, they are at serious risk of detention and torture on return, not just at the airport, but following return to their home areas.[527]

The Upper Tribunal found that Tamils who engage in a range of political activities in the United Kingdom may continue to face "a real risk of ill-treatment or harm" if deported to Sri Lanka, in a significant ruling that clarifies and expands those who may face persecution on the island. The Upper Tribunal stated that Sri Lanka may target more than those who hold formal positions in diaspora organisations and listed a range of activities, carried out both through organisations, or as individuals, that may place a person at risk.[528]

The Upper Tribunal noted:

"[Sri Lanka] draws no material distinction between the violent means of the LTTE and non-violent political advocacy,"
"To this extent, Government of Sri Lanka's interpretation of separatism is not limited to the pursuance thereof by violent means alone; it encompasses the political sphere as well… there is no tolerance of the expression of any avowedly separatist or perceived separatist beliefs."
"It is abundantly clear that there is a reasonable likelihood that those detained by the Sri Lankan authorities will be subjected to persecution." [529] [530]

---

[526] **Upper Tribunal (Immigration and Asylum Chamber) Appeal Numbers: PA/09978/2016 PA/13288/2018 issued on 27 May 2021. UK.** (page 66, paragraph 302) https://www.doughtystreet.co.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/KK%20%26%20RS%20%28Sri%20Lanka%29.pdf

[527] **Joint Media Release: Human rights groups demand suspension of reports on Sri Lanka to assess refugee applications following rejection by a UK court. Jun 3, 2021**. Australian Centre for International Justice. https://acij.org.au/joint-media-release-human-rights-groups-demand-suspension-of-reports-on-sri-lanka-to-assess-refugee-applications-following-rejection-by-a-uk-court/

[528] **How a landmark British ruling may save Tamil activists from deportation to Sri Lanka.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 5 June 2021). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/how-landmark-british-ruling-may-save-tamil-activists-deportation-sri-lanka

[529] **How a landmark British ruling may save Tamil activists from deportation to Sri Lanka.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 5 June 2021). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/how-landmark-british-ruling-may-save-tamil-activists-deportation-sri-lanka

[530] **New country guidance issued by the Upper Tribunal in Sri Lankan asylum claims. Doughty Street Chambers. UK. 28 May 2021**. https://www.doughtystreet.co.uk/news/new-country-guidance-issued-upper-tribunal-sri-lankan-asylum-claims

The Upper Tribunal stated that there was also the need to apply wider principles of refugee law when examining cases of Tamil asylum seekers, highlighting the HJ (Iran) principle – a 2010 ruling that was affirmed in 2012. It added that "if it is found that the individual would not seek to express their separatist beliefs on return… to avoid the risk of persecution and serious harm, they are entitled to international protection." [531]

Citing the criticism of the UK Upper Tribunal, the NSW Council for Civil Liberties in July 2021 called on the Australian Government's DFAT to withdraw its 2019 Country Information Report - Sri Lanka, due to concerns over its currency and accuracy. This report was relied on to refuse protection to Tamils including the Murugappan family.[532]

Treatment of Returnees and Failed Asylum Seekers

In an interview in March 2022 with the Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, a professor at an American university who focuses on South Asian politics stated that asylum seekers are viewed as having "undermined or shamed the country" and that returnees who sought asylum are viewed as "traitors". According to the Professor, Tamil or Muslim individuals have a "greater" chance of being on the watch list. The Professor stated that if there is a reason for the authorities to believe the person was connected to the LTTE during the war, even for something such as transporting goods for a Tamil person that they did not know was connected to the LTTE, they are "taken into custody and tortured, [and face] extortion." The Professor added that "ethnicity matters" and Tamils face "more scrutiny," especially those who are failed asylum seekers. The Professor stated that in "every" village there are people who will alert the authorities to the individuals entering the village, making it impossible to remain hidden [533]

In correspondence in March 2022 with the Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, the Executive Director of Law & Society Trust, a not-for-profit "engaged in legal research, advocacy and human rights documentation", noted that there is "resentment and antipathy" toward both Tamil refugees and Tamil asylum seekers as the government believes that they have "aired negative views about Sri Lanka and the government abroad." [534]

---

[531] **New country guidance issued by the Upper Tribunal in Sri Lankan asylum claims. Doughty Street Chambers. UK. 28 May 2021**. https://www.doughtystreet.co.uk/news/new-country-guidance-issued-upper-tribunal-sri-lankan-asylum-claims

[532] **NSWCCL calls on DFAT to retract Sri Lanka report.** *NSW Council for Civil Liberties*,16 July 2021. https://www.nswccl.org.au/dfat

[533] **Sri Lanka: Situation and treatment of returnees, including failed asylum seekers (2020–March 2022). Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. May 2022**. https://irb.gc.ca/en/country-information/rir/Pages/index.aspx?doc=458595&pls=1

[534] **Sri Lanka: Situation and treatment of returnees, including failed asylum seekers (2020–March 2022). Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. May 2022**. https://irb.gc.ca/en/country-information/rir/Pages/index.aspx?doc=458595&pls=1

In an interview in March 2022 with the Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, The Analyst, International Crisis Group noted that there have been "credible allegations" over the years of people thought to have connections to the LTTE being arrested, detained and tortured and there is "deep mistrust" among security forces of Tamil returnees.[535]

Expert evidence provided in May 2021 by academic and consultant Dr Chris Smith to the UK Upper Tribunal in a landmark immigration case, cited evidence relating to the treatment of detainees by the Sri Lankan authorities. Dr Smith stated that, based on a source within the Sri Lankan State Intelligence Service (SIS), the electronic database which underlies the stop and watch lists contains many thousands of names which remain in place for life. That database can be consulted at the airport and, if appropriate, an individual could be handed over to the Sri Lankan State Intelligence Service (SIS), the Sri Lankan Terrorist Investigation Department (TID), or the Sri Lankan Criminal Investigation Department (CID). The latter two maintain a permanent presence at the airport, with the CID controlling the database in relation to arrivals. Dr Smith's view is that the wider database will not necessarily have information on every individual but will do so if they have previously been "arrested or informed upon". Information can easily be obtained from other districts within Sri Lanka itself, given the networked capability of the state's overall intelligence sector.[536]

Dr. Smith's Report further stated: "The Sri Lankan authorities therefore possess the wherewithal to identify and detain members of the Tamil diaspora who they perceive to be of potential or existing adverse interest. Once identified they have the legal right under the PTA to detain almost whomsoever they wish. Once detained, Tamils associated with the diaspora are vulnerable and at risk of extreme ill-treatment that will violate their civil liberties and their human rights." Dr Smith's view was that "any" organisation or individual perceived to be threatening to the state will be of adverse interest. He stated that the watch list is being used "extensively" and is used to facilitate monitoring/surveillance once a returnee has passed to the airport and returns to their home area. Dr Smith's source of information about the watch list was a security officer. [537]

In May 2021 Rohan Gunaratna, a professor of security studies at Nanyang Technology University, Singapore, who has conducted research on the LTTE, provided expert oral evidence to the UK Upper Tribunal. He indicated that the database is "'detailed and elaborate'"; while there is a "'gradient'" with those

---

[535] **Sri Lanka: Situation and treatment of returnees, including failed asylum seekers (2020–March 2022). Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. May 2022**. https://irb.gc.ca/en/country-information/rir/Pages/index.aspx?doc=458595&pls=1

[536] **UK Upper Tribunal (Immigration and Asylum Chamber) Hearing. May 2021. Appeal Numbers: PA/09978/2016 PA/13288/2018. [paragraphs 33, 37, 38, 39, 45, 47, 73]** https://www.doughtystreet.co.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/KK%20%26%20RS%20%28Sri%20Lanka%29.pdf

[537] **UK Upper Tribunal (Immigration and Asylum Chamber) Hearing. May 2021. Appeal Numbers: PA/09978/2016 PA/13288/2018. [paragraphs 33, 37, 38, 39, 45, 47, 73]** https://www.doughtystreet.co.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/KK%20%26%20RS%20%28Sri%20Lanka%29.pdf

suspected of more serious crimes, such as obtaining weapons, "treated more harshly," "even those at a low level would not be tolerated"; everyone in the database would "'certainly' be detained." [538]

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada in March 2022, a sessional lecturer at a Canadian university, who has conducted field work in Sri Lanka with a research focus on conflict prevention and peacebuilding, made the following observation. Drawing on research compiled by NGOs and the country guidance from the UK Upper Tribunal decision, returnees involved in Tamil diaspora activism, such as being a member of a diaspora organization or attending a protest, and individuals with "any association" with the LTTE, are "at risk of persecution on return to Sri Lanka." [539]

According to the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade Sri Lanka Country Information Report (Dec. 2021), local sources have indicated that "some" returnees, particularly individuals in the North and East with suspected LTTE links, are monitored by the authorities, including visits to their home and telephone calls by the CID.[540]

In August 2021 a Tamil man, who had been studying in Edinburgh went to Sri Lanka after his father fell ill. Whilst there, he was grabbed from the street and put into a white van and taken away.

"I did not believe I would survive after I was abducted off the street and taken blindfolded to a torture centre where I was beaten and abused day after day," the man continued, telling of how he was branded with lit cigarettes and fell unconscious as his captors placed a petrol-dowsed plastic bag over his head. *"If my family had not found bribe money, I would have been killed," he said after he fled back to Scotland in September. "I can never return home."* [541]

In April 2021, Tamil Makkal Thesiya Kootani leader, C.V. Wigneswaran said that Tamil asylum seekers, recently deported to Sri Lanka, were at risk of "surveillance, torture and arbitrary detention." He highlighted that Sri Lanka's notorious Prevention of Terrorism Act "continues to be used to justify the mistreatment of Tamils for no reason other than their ethnicity."[542] The returned

---

[538] **Sri Lanka: Situation and treatment of returnees, including failed asylum seekers (2020–March 2022). Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. May 2022**. Section 3.2. https://irb.gc.ca/en/country-information/rir/Pages/index.aspx?doc=458595&pls=1

[539] **Sri Lanka: Situation and treatment of returnees, including failed asylum seekers (2020–March 2022). Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. May 2022**. Section 3.2. https://irb.gc.ca/en/country-information/rir/Pages/index.aspx?doc=458595&pls=1

[540] **Australian Government DFAT Country Information Report Sri Lanka. December 2021. [para.5.29]** https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/country-information-report-sri-lanka.pdf

[541] **Torture victim accuses Police Scotland of strengthening Sri Lankan regime**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, 31st October 2021). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/torture-victim-accuses-police-scotland-strengthening-sri-lankan-regime

[542] **Tamil asylum seekers deported to Sri Lanka at risk of 'surveillance, arbitrary detention and torture' says Wigneswaran.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 1 April 2021). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamil-asylum-seekers-deported-sri-lanka-risk-surveillance-arbitrary-detention-and-torture

asylum seekers were handed to the Sri Lankan army by the Immigration and Emmigration department at Bandaranaike International Airport. After quarantine they were to be handed to the CID and the National Intelligence Unit for legal action.[543]

Representatives from the Sri Lankan Department of Immigration and Emigration in October 2019 provided the following information about returned refused asylum seekers: If a person is identified as a failed asylum seeker they will be questioned, then passed to CID. They may be released but monitored. The local police would be informed, and the person would be monitored although the length of time may vary.[544]

A representative of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) interviewed in October 2019 by a UK Fact Finding Mission replied, when asked if someone who has claimed asylum in the UK would have a reasonable fear when they return:
"It has to be viewed in context of what is happening- the rule of law is not enforced or observed, there have been thousands of cases where they have been no investigations. People have natural fear in country where they do not feel safe. If they left because they fear persecution and been involved in some activity that puts them at risk then it needs to be understood in that context, that background […] Tamils who left the country as a result of LTTE or as a result of fear of persecution are being identified someway when they come back- they could fear that they might not be safe" [545]

A Tamil refugee who escaped Sri Lanka some years ago reported:
"When a refugee is returned by Home Affairs to Sri Lanka, a representative of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) meets the returned person at Colombo airport. Sri Lanka's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) then takes the person into custody and asks questions because the original departure from Sri Lanka was illegal. Out of fear the person will not want to tell the CID the real reason for leaving as this will impact on the person and his/her family. A bribe might help. The person may be bailed and then face ongoing court visits to report. However, you may not be bailed, but punished brutally, especially if your name is within their system – for being a freedom fighter in the past or working as a social activist for the Tamil people. Your file might still be there." [546]

---

[543] **Tamil deportees to be handed to CID after 'quarantine process'.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 01 April 2021). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamil-deportees-be-handed-cid-after-quarantine-process

[544] **Sri Lanka: Country Report. July 2020 (**COI between 1 January 2020 and 19 May 2020). Asylum Research Centre (ARC), June 2020. (pages 312-313)
https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2033016/FINAL_ARC_COI_report_on_Sri_Lanka_July_2020PDF.pdf

[545] **Sri Lanka: Country Report. July 2020 (COI between 1 January 2020 and 19 May 2020). Asylum Research Centre (ARC), June 2020. (pages 312-313)**
https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2033016/FINAL_ARC_COI_report_on_Sri_Lanka_July_2020PDF.pdf

[546] **Anecdotal evidence from a Tamil refugee in Australia**. September 2020.

In May 2019, UN News reported that:

The UN Committee Against Torture has expressed concern over the United Kingdom's policy of forcibly returning asylum-seekers to places where they face a risk of abuse – highlighting 43 enforced returns to Sri Lanka last year.[547]

In December 2019, a spokesperson for Australia's Department of Home Affairs said:

"We cooperate closely with the Sri Lankan government to return people who have been intercepted trying to reach Australia illegally and have returned 38 Sri Lankan nationals across three vessels since May 2019." [548]

In August 2021, a Tamil asylum seeker in Australia died after self-immolating.

"We have lost many refugees to Australia's refugee policy, and we dread that there will be more. Asylum seekers have been telling us for a long time that they would prefer to die here than be sent back to Sri Lanka. Here we have yet another case illustrating just how desperate and hopeless the situation has become for Tamil refugees in Australia," said a spokesperson for the Tamil Refugee Council in Australia. [549]

A Tamil asylum seeker family in Australia had been fighting deportation to Sri Lanka under Australia's Coalition Government. The Federal Court ruled in April 2020 that an injunction applied to the family's two-year-old daughter Tharunicaa. The judge ruled that Tharunicaa was *"not afforded procedural fairness"* in her asylum bid.[550] In August 2022, after a change in government in Australia, the Tamil family was granted a permanent visa by the Albanese Labor Government. [551]

Returned asylum seeker Sebamalai Jesupalam from Mullaitivu said the asylum seeker boat he was on in 2012 was stopped by the Sri Lankan navy. Eight years on he still attends mandatory court hearings in the city of Negombo - a six-hour journey from his home.[552]

---

[547] **Sri Lanka: Country Report. July 2020 (**COI between 1 January 2020 and 19 May 2020). Asylum Research Centre (ARC), June 2020. (pages 312-313). https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2033016/FINAL_ARC_COI_report_on_Sri_Lanka_July_2020PDF.pdf

[548] A. Fernandes. **This is what happened to the Tamil asylum seekers Australia sent back to Sri Lanka.** *SBS News. Asia-Pacific* (online, 2 December 2019). https://www.sbs.com.au/news/this-is-what-happened-to-the-tamil-asylum-seekers-australia-sent-back-to-sri-lanka

[549] **Tamil refugee dies after self-immolation in Australia.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 22 August 2021) https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamil-refugee-dies-after-self-immolation-australia

[550] **Tamil girl 'not afforded procedural fairness' in Biloela family's asylum bid, Federal Court rules.** *ABC News* (online, 17 April 2020). https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-17/biloela-tamil-family-decision-in-federal-court/12156380

[551] **'Biloela' Tamil family finally gets permanent residency.** *The Conversation* (online, 5 August 2022). https://theconversation.com/biloela-tamil-family-finally-gets-permanent-residency-188306

[552] A. Fernandes. **This is what happened to the Tamil asylum seekers Australia sent back to Sri Lanka.** *SBS News. Asia-Pacific* (online, 2 December 2019). https://www.sbs.com.au/news/this-is-what-happened-to-the-tamil-asylum-seekers-australia-sent-back-to-sri-lanka

Based on interviews with 26 Tamil asylum seekers in Britain, the International Truth and Justice Project reported in October 2019 that all the interviewees said their families

"had been repeatedly visited by security services after they had fled the country – including some as recently as September 2019".

"This shows that surveillance in the UK of Tamils, who have been forced to go into exile, is being used to silence victims and witnesses," said the Executive Director of the International Truth and Justice Project, Yasmin Sooka, "state agencies wouldn't need to silence victims' families if they hadn't driven them out in the first place." [553]

In September 2018, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention stated that the use of torture by Sri Lankan security forces on Tamil detainees continues. The Working Group highlighted several areas of concern, including the use of torture of those held in detention, highlighting the case of Tamils who return to the island.

"The Working Group also received accounts of Tamils who were arrested and detained in 2015, 2016 and 2017 when returning to Sri Lanka after seeking asylum in another country or working abroad," said the report. *"The Working Group received testimony that, in some cases, the returnees were beaten and kept under surveillance once released and charged with offences relating to illegal departure from Sri Lanka."* [554]

In August 2018, a Tamil asylum seeker died after a suicide attempt in Australia, following the rejection of his asylum application by the Australian government. [555]

In July 2018, Tamil asylum seeker Thileepan Gnaneswaran was deported from Australia and detained by Sri Lankan police on arrival in Colombo. He was charged by Sri Lankan authorities for illegally leaving the country. The offence is understood to carry a maximum sentence of a fine of 200,000 rupees and prison term of five years. The deportation was widely criticised, including by the UN Refugee Agency who condemned Australia's actions to separate a family indefinitely, as his Tamil wife and child remain as refugees in Australia.[556]

In February 2018, Tamil asylum seeker Mr Santharupan was deported from Australia despite direct criticism from the UN refugee agency. He was arrested and charged by Sri Lankan authorities. In his deportation notice, ABF officers

---

[553] **Families of Tamil asylum seekers assaulted by Sri Lankan security forces.** *Tamil Guardian.* (online, 30 October 2019). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/families-tamil-asylum-seekers-assaulted-sri-lankan-security-forces

[554] **UN Working Group finds continued use of torture in Sri Lanka**. *Tamil Guardian* (online, 15 December 2017). http://www.tamilguardian.com/content/un-working-group-finds-continued-use-torture-sri-lanka

[555] **Tamil asylum seeker commits suicide in Australia after application rejection.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 28 August 2018). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamil-asylum-seeker-commits-suicide-australia-after-application-rejection

[556] **Deported Tamil refugee charged.** *Tamil Guardian* (online, 20 July 2018). https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/deported-tamil-refugee-charged

said his personal information may be disclosed to foreign governments or agencies as part of his removal. [557]

Santharupan has experienced ongoing harassment. Security forces have made multiple visits to his home and recorded the details of his wife and children, including the school his children attend.

Tamil Refugee Council spokesperson Aran Mylvaganam said:

"The security forces are trying to intimidate not only Santharuban but his family as well. Such visits strike deep fears in Tamils, who continue to face assault, torture and disappearance at the hands of the Criminal Investigation Department (known as CID), the Special Task Force and other sections of the police and military."[558]

On 11 December 2017, the UN Committee Against Torture (CAT) advised the Australian Government that a Tamil man held in immigration detention in Australia and in danger of imminent deportation, should not be returned to Sri Lanka. Director Principal of Human Rights for All, Alison Battisson, said of the interim order:

"The Committee Against Torture's interim measure once again highlights the serious issues faced by Tamil asylum seekers in Australia. By issuing this measure, the UN recognises that Sri Lanka is not safe for Tamils, despite Australia denying refugee status to many Tamils. …. These interim measures are quite rare - this illustrates the very real concern the UN has over Australia's practices of refouling Tamils to Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is not safe for many Tamils to return to." [559]

In November 2017, the Associated Press (AP) detailed ongoing allegations of rape and torture of 50 Tamil men by Sri Lankan security forces that are said to have taken place between 2016 and July 2017.
AP noted:

"Raped, branded or beaten repeatedly, more than 50 men from the Tamil ethnic minority seeking political asylum in Europe say they were abducted and tortured under Sri Lanka's current government." [560]

A damning report from the International Truth and Justice Project *"Unstopped: State Torture & Sexual Violence in 2016/17*, took detailed testimony from 57 Tamil victims of illegal detention and torture under the Sirisena government, with 24 cases occurring in 2016 or 2017. Findings of the report highlighted that Tamils were abducted and tortured for a range of reasons including political campaigning, returning from the diaspora, and having family members that used to belong to the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The

---

[557] **Tamil Tiger due to be deported says he will face torture in Sri Lanka.** *ABC News* (online, 21 February 2018). http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-02-21/tamil-tiger-due-to-be-deported-says-he-will-face-torture/9468088

[558] A. Mylvaganam. **Deported Tamil Man harassed by security forces in Sri Lanka**. *Tamil Refugee Council* (online, 28 February 2018). http://tamilrefugeecouncil.org.au/portfolio-items/tamil-man-harassed/

[559] **UN Advice to Australia Not to Deport Tamil Asylum Seeker**. *Scoop Independent News* (online, 14 December 2017). https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/WO1712/S00174/un-advice-to-australia-not-to-deport-tamil-asylum-seeker.htm

[560] **Dozens of men say Sri Lankan forces raped and tortured them.** *AP News* (online, 9 November 2017) https://apnews.com/article/ced017bd441f46ba838aaedf6ff5dbe2

interrogators asked about participation in protests abroad, indicating that these events are still watched closely. Victims in detention have also been told there were photographs of them attending protest events abroad, indicating that this kind of activity abroad still poses a significant risk for anyone likely to visit or be returned to Sri Lanka. [561]

In June 2016, a British Tamil man who had lived in the UK for 16 years, was detained and tortured upon returning to Sri Lanka to be married. Ambi Seevaratnam, international coordinator of the International Centre for the Prevention and Prosecution of Genocide, said:

"He has torture marks all over his body. We need to get him out of Sri Lanka and back to the UK as soon as possible. Any Tamil who is a British citizen who travels to Sri Lanka from London seems to be suspected of being a traitor." [562]

[561] **Unstopped: State Torture & Sexual Violence in 2016/17.** International Truth & Justice, July 2017. www.itjpsl.com

[562] **British Tamil 'tortured and detained' during Sri Lanka wedding trip.** *The Guardian* (online, 11 June 2016). https://www.theguardian.com/law/2016/jun/11/sri-lanka-british-tamil-velauthapillai-renukaruban-tortured-wedding