

NEWS

Footage investigation not 'impartial' says UN Special Rapporteur

SRI LANKA'S purported investigation into the footage of soldiers shooting unarmed, naked men is neither impartial nor reliable, a UN representative has said.

The footage, showing the purported execution of naked, blindfolded civilians by troops in Sri Lankan Army uniform, was first shown on Channel 4 news in Britain after being smuggled out of Sri Lanka by a group called Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lankan government denied the authenticity of the video and conducted four 'independent investigations', which it says prove the video is fake.

But Professor Philip Alston, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions appointed by the United Nations Human Rights Council, rebuffed the investigation, saying they were not 'impartial'. He has called for fresh new independent and impartial investigations.

"Two of these individuals are full-time Government employees, one has previously acted on behalf of the Government, and the basis on which the fourth was identified and selected as an expert remains unclear," he said.

He concludes that "on the basis of the information made available by the Government, that the investigations undertaken cannot be characterized as 'impartial'."

The official statement from Philip Alston follows:

"The legal obligation incumbent upon a Government in a situation such as this is to undertake a 'thorough, prompt and impartial investigation'," he said.

Nothing that he could "attest to the fact that the investigation has been 'prompt' since it was completed within two weeks of the information becoming available," he nevertheless challenged whether it was thorough or impartial.

"I am not, however, in a position to conclude that it was 'thorough.' I have not seen the original version of three of the four expert investigations. The fourth of the investigations seems to have originated as an Opinion piece in The Island newspaper, and was subsequently elaborated upon. It is not clear whether or not this was at the Government's request. The statement provided by the Minister summarizes "observations" made by the remaining three experts in presentations made at a meeting convened by the Government for this purpose. I would welcome the publication of the full text of the analyses undertaken and reports presented by each of the four experts," he said.

"The third and most important question is whether the "four separate investigations" meet the criteria of impartiality. I would note that two of the experts are members of the Sri Lankan Army, the body whose actions have been called into question. A third report

is by Dr. Chathura De Silva, BSc Eng Hons (Moratuwa), MEng (NTU), PhD (NUS), Senior Lecturer, Dept of Computer Science and Engineering, University of Moratuwa, who has advised the Government in relation to a number of other similar issues in the past. And the fourth is by Siri Hewawitharana, a broadcast media specialist based in Australia, who is said to be the former head of Cisco's global broadcast and digital video practice. No other information has been provided by the government on Mr Hewawitharana, but it would appear that he is a member of a network of Sri Lankan Professionals. I would welcome more information on how he was identified and selected by the government as an independent expert," he said.

"Based on the limited information available to me, it is impossible to conclude that these four individuals, given their relationship to the Government, meet the criteria for impartiality in this context. When the actions of a Government are called into question in a matter of this gravity, what is required is to undertake an investigation by demonstrated experts who can be shown to be fully independent of the Government concerned," he said.

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Philip Alston has questioned the Sri Lankan investigation into video footage showing soldiers shooting dead naked, unarmed men

identified and selected as an expert remains unclear. I must conclude therefore, on the basis of the information made available by the Government, that the investigations undertaken cannot be characterized as "impartial," he said.

"The final question that remains is whether the information provided by the Government raises significant doubts as to the authenticity of the video. On this question, my conclusion is that the views expressed do indeed

raise several issues which warrant further investigation before it could reasonably be concluded that the video is authentic."

"The only way to do this is for an independent and impartial investigation to take place. This is all that I have called for. Such an investigation might well conclude that the position adopted by the Government is fully warranted. I would welcome that outcome very warmly, and I hope that the Government would do likewise," Alston concluded.

Army to play key role in Sri Lanka's development

Press Trust of India

AFTER successfully defeating the LTTE, the Sri Lankan army is ready to play a significant role in the development of the country, Sri Lankan Army Chief of Staff Major General Mendaka Samarasinghe has said.

"Apart from its primary role it (the Sri Lankan army) will also play a big role in the development drive of the country in the future," Samarasinghe said, on Friday September 18, in an address to the media at the Army Headquarters on the diamond jubilee celebrations of the Sri Lankan Army.

He said the strength of the Sri

Lankan Army had grown more than ten fold since its inception in 1949 to date, as it got ready to celebrate its diamond jubilee as a victorious Army.

The top army official said the Army's strength has reached around 200,000 as of today due to the rigorous recruitment drive carried out during the past two to three years to fulfil the battle requirement to defeat LTTE "terrorism".

He said the Army will organise the diamond jubilee celebrations in October not only to showcase its achievement but also to encourage the youth to join the Army as a career and as a noble profession in the future.

'Paranoid Colombo machinates human shield'

TamilNet

A WHOLE world is duped in what Colombo is machinating in the name of resettlement of IDPs, Tamil circles in Jaffna commented, citing Sri Lanka Navy's new internment camps around its installations in the island sector of Jaffna. Colombo's aim is three-fold: a human shield of civilians for its occupying forces, prevention of rightful owners reoccupying houses and lands around its military installations and eventually confiscating those lands in strategic areas for its expansion and other demographic conspiracies in the very heart of Tamil homeland, pointed out Tamil circles adding that a paranoid Sri Lankan state can never deliver justice to Tamils.

The core truth is that the barbed-wire camps came up

because the world powers wanted it. But some powers by not directly taking responsibility and some others like India by sitting on international action continue injustice, Jaffna circles said.

The SLN 'resettled' nearly 2000 civilians brought from the internment camps of Vavuniya in new internment camps created by using abandoned houses around its naval installations in Kaarainakar and in Kayts, at the end of September.

For nearly two decades now, Colombo's armed forces are occupying vast tracts of potential civilian land along the northern coast of the peninsula in the name of High Security Zone.

A so-called 'development model' for Jaffna that is now being circulated shows that this tract is not going to be returned to people, but is going to be used for resource exploitation and a new

city for the occupiers, with harbour, airport and military installations, as a joint venture of Colombo and New Delhi.

Reviving the cement factory in Kaankeasanthurai is the biggest environmental crime that is going to affect hundreds of thousands of civilians, discouraging them from inhabiting the northern part of the peninsula, academic circles in Jaffna said.

Meanwhile, the SLA installed landmine blast that seriously injured three recently resettled civilians in the Ariyaalai tract is alleged to be another trick of Colombo to discourage the call for expediting resettlement.

Unless the international community takes direct responsibility and removes Colombo's occupying armed forces, peace and 'reconciliation' is a mirage in the island, opined a veteran Tamil politician in Jaffna.