

NEWS

Video is authentic, Alston calls for wider war crimes probe

PHILIP Alston, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, in a press meet called for wider investigations into allegations of war crimes in Sri Lanka after three forensic experts hired by Alston and two previous independent analyses by Times On Line (UK), and a Colorado firm confirmed the authenticity of the video broadcast by Channel-4 in August.

"An independent United Nations human rights expert said there are strong indications that the video of alleged extrajudicial executions by Sri Lankan soldiers that aired last August on British television is authentic," said a report on the UN website.

Philip Alston, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, commissioned three experts in forensic pathology, forensic video analysis, and firearm evidence to examine the video, after concluding that the investigations carried out by the Sri Lankan government had not been thorough or impartial.

"The conclusion clearly is that the video is authentic," he told a news conference in New York. "I have therefore called on the Government of Sri Lanka to respond to these allegations."

Professor Alston said that the best option was for Sri Lanka to co-operate and invite in UN investigators as part of an independent commission of inquiry.

Human rights officials told The Times that Sri Lanka would be given an ultimatum to co-operate or face more decisive action.

The appointment of a commission would allow the UN to begin gathering forensic evidence required for an investigation or even future prosecution. There is already grave concern over the degradation of evidence in the nearly nine months since the conflict ended, reported The Times.

The Sri Lankan government has categorically denied the allegations raised by the video, which purportedly depicts the extrajudicial execution of two naked and helpless Tamil men by the Sri Lankan military and the presumed prior executions of others.

The video shows a man dressed as a soldier shooting a

man in the head. After a man in army uniform shoots a naked, bound and blindfolded man in the back of the head, the video shows the bodies of eight others in a field nearby. A second man is shot in the final seconds of the video.

The Sri Lankan government claimed to have commissioned four separate investigations which concluded that the video was a fake.

However, Mr. Alston had pointed out that two of the Government's experts looking into the matter were members of the Sri Lankan Army, the body whose actions have been called into question.

Meanwhile, the reports by the three experts from the United States commissioned by Mr. Alston to examine the video "strongly suggest that the video is authentic," according to a note prepared by the Special Rapporteur.

Peter Diaczuk, an expert in firearms evidence, concluded that the recoil, movement of the weapon and the shooter, and the gases expelled from the muzzle in both apparent shootings were consistent with firing live ammunition, and not with shooting blank cartridges.

Daniel Spitz, a prominent forensic pathologist, found that the footage appeared authentic, especially with respect to the two individuals who are shown being shot in the head at close range. He found that the body reaction, movement, and blood evidence was entirely consistent with what would be expected in such shootings.

Jeff Spivack, an expert in forensic video analysis, found no evidence of breaks in continuity in the video, no additional video layers, and no evidence of image manipulation.

"Given these conclusions, and in light of the persistent flow of other allegations of extrajudicial executions by both sides during the closing phases of the war against the LTTE, I call for the establishment of an independent inquiry to carry out an impartial investigation into war crimes and other grave violations of international humanitarian and human rights law allegedly committed in Sri Lanka," stated Mr. Alston.



Srinivasa Rao and Gnanasekaran are travelling to globe drawing attention to the plight of Eelam Tamils

Copenhagen exhibits expose NorthEast environmental destruction

TWO environmentalists from Tamil Nadu, interrupted their world tour promoting environment preservation, to organize an exhibit in the hallways of the climate change conference in Copenhagen between 7th and 18th December, to highlight the irreversible deforestation in the Tamil homeland of North-East carried out by the Sri Lanka military.

"Decades-long massive military operations and occupation of Tamil Eelam by Sri Lanka's military have caused grave environmental destruction to the north and east of the island. Recovery is difficult as the Tamil homeland is in the dry and arid part of the island, depending on scanty and truant northeast monsoon," the two activists said, echoing many Eelam activists' sentiments.

Mr. T. Srinivasa Rao, 48, with his family and R. Gnanasekaran, 46, were in Denmark for the global meet.

The two activists are on a global tour promoting environmental awareness and have cov-

ered 600,000 km since 1986 visiting 120 countries and attended both the previous UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) summits.

Recently, three thousand acres of forest were cleared to erect the nazi-type concentration camps to detain the detain more than 350,000 Tamil civilians, and the entire Tamil population of Vanni were kept without freedom of movement under atrocious conditions behind barbed wire, and supervised by Sri Lanka military, Rao and Gnanasekaran told the interested viewers of the exhibit.

One of the pictures revealed the story of how the 30,000 people of Champoor were forcibly displaced in 2007 from their homes, where they were living for generations, and still remain as refugees in the camps erected in the East.

This land is now waiting to be handed over for the Coal Powered Plant to generate Electricity to National Thermal Power Corporation of India (NTPC), the

two activists pointed out to the viewers.

"The forests were recklessly destroyed by more than a hundred thousand soldiers deployed in Vanni, to make camps, artillery bases, bund protections, roads and cleared protection strips on either side of the roads. The destruction of forests and the creation of security zone bunds in many places have affected the catchment areas of streams and reservoirs. The animal habitats in many areas of destroyed dense forest have been irrevocably damaged," the activists told the exhibit viewers.

Danish Tamil Forum and British Tamil Forum provided help and logistic assistance to organizing the photographic exhibition, the two activists said.

Many international NGO's and individual activists involved in the Climate Change Convention, after viewing the exhibits, left educated on the environmental damages inflicted on Tamil Eelam environment, the activists said.

He added that there are a small number of characteristics of the video which the experts were unable to explain, including the movement of certain victims in the video, 17 frames at the end of the video, and the date of 17 July 2009 encoded in the video (the conflict was officially declared over in May 2009).

"Each of these characteristics can, however, be explained in a manner entirely consistent with the conclusion that the videotape

appears to be authentic," noted a news release also issued with the press conference.

"In sum, while there are some unexplained elements in the video, there are strong indications of its authenticity. In addition, most of the arguments relied upon by the Government of Sri Lanka to impugn the video have been shown to be flawed."

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka angrily rejected the UN claims that the footage is genuine.

The government described a UN inquiry into the video's authenticity as "highly subjective and biased". It said the footage was "fabricated".

"We don't accept his conclusions and we believe his conclusions are highly subjective and biased," Human Rights Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe said of Mr Alston's investigations into the footage. "We believe he is on

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