

INTERNATIONAL
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PROJECT

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Press Release: Alleged Torturer heads Sri Lankan CID.

Johannesburg: International assistance to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Sri Lankan police must be urgently reviewed now that a well known alleged torturer has been put in charge. Senior Superintendent of Police Adambarage Ruwan Prasanna Jayak De Alwis was appointed the new Director of CID by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on Friday¹.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:
YASMIN SOOKA

Prasanna de Alwis is named in numerous court documents in connection with torture, including the case filed by eleven Tamils in 2019 in California against Gotabaya Rajapaksa. A 13 page dossier which includes Alwis, among many others, was submitted as evidence in this case².

"This is a gravely worrying step, especially before parliamentary elections," said the Executive Director of the International Truth and Justice Project, Yasmin Sooka. *"Multiple detainees have named Prasanna de Alwis as torturing them or being complicit in their torture, dating back as far as 1998. Prasanna de Alwis has remained extremely loyal to Gotabaya Rajapaksa who directly issued orders to him during the war when Alwis was in the police Terrorism Investigation Division".*

Systematic torture by TID in the period when Prasana de Alwis was based in TID headquarters has been documented by multiple United Nations mechanisms including Special Rapporteurs on Torture and the 2015 OHCHR Investigation report (OISL) into Sri Lanka. Successive US State Department annual human rights reports also refer to brutal forms of torture used by the TID during this period. The notorious police unit was the subject of a detailed ITJP report³ published in 2019, based on

¹ http://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking_news/CID-MSD-SIU-Directors-among-latest-police-transfers/108-188785

² <https://itjpsl.com/assets/press/ECF-No.-0066-3-Exhibit-B-to-Sooka-Decl.pdf> Page 43.

³ <https://itjpsl.com/reports/terrorism-investigation-division>

the testimony of 73 survivors of TID torture interviewed in 5 countries. The ITJP report also identified 58 alleged torturers in TID including those who bear command responsibility. As far back as 2007, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Manfred Nowak, named several of the same alleged perpetrators of torture in TID when he visited Sri Lanka and not one was investigated or prosecuted. Instead many were subsequently promoted.

“This man is emblematic of impunity in Sri Lanka,” said Yasmin Sooka. The international community is obliged to ensure that those responsible for torture are held accountable. Sri Lanka is obliged in terms of its international commitments to ensure that torturers are vetted and screened from holding public office.”

Canadian citizen Roy Samathanam, who filed the case against Gotabaya Rajapaksa in 2019 in California, said in his court submission that while in TID detention in December 2007, he overheard a phone call between Prasanna de Alwis and Gotabaya Rajapaksa discussing his case. Later that evening, he received a particularly brutal torture session at the hands of TID officers leaving him with a swollen left wrist, injured knees, and pain in the stomach and groin area. The following morning, Prasanna de Alwis asked Roy what had happened to him the previous night. He then warned Roy not to tell the Red Cross about the beating and said he would no longer be beaten and would be released if he signed a confession. Roy told Prasanna de Alwis that he wanted to see a lawyer, to which the policeman responded, “You can’t have a lawyer. No one can help you here.” In 2016, Roy Samathanam won a UN Human Rights Committee complaint regarding his torture in TID custody and the Government of Sri Lanka was ordered to give him compensation but failed to comply⁴.

Prasanna de Alwis was also named in the Fundamental Rights Applications of several Tamil journalists detained and tortured during the war, including Vettival Jasikaran and his partner Valarmathy Vadivelu, and Jayaprakash Sittampalam Tissainayagam, who was described by President Obama as emblematic of an unjustly persecuted journalist⁵.

In addition, Alwis was questioned in connection with his role in the investigation into the murder of Sunday Leader editor Lasantha Wickrematunge in 2009. A former army intelligence officer Kandededara Piyawansa, who was arrested in 2010 by TID for the murder, made a statement in open court in 2016 alleging that Alwis had tried to influence him into making a statement implicating the former Army Commander Sarath Fonseka in Lasantha’s assassination, with the promise of being made a state witness and given overseas employment⁶.

In February 2017, reports say then TID Director, DIG Nalaka de Silva, lodged a complaint with the Inspector General of Police against Prasanna de Alwis. The complaint alleged embezzlement and that Alwis had tried to implicate Sarath Fonseka in the murder of Lasantha Wickrematunge. Later Nalaka de Silva was arrested for his role in an alleged plot to kill Gotabaya Rajapaksa, then President Maithripala Sirisena and

⁴<http://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2FPPRiCAqhKb7yhsukPtYsnxNH1DBeueuCbK4hkTaGALQTPp6XpwSalkyo%2FLgQxV9qfCNKUejQM1toFhnFL9Pb1%2FLHlv%2BzEoA3ETH7F6N70gpwuCEmo2ItyaC7I00w9wfXUd%2FDfXG%2F8m14sJQ%3D%3D>

⁵ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/js-tissainayagam-journalist-lauded-by-obama-is-jailed-in-sri-lanka-5xrb15z2dg2>

⁶ <https://www.vikalpa.org/?p=19250>

Prasanna de Alwis⁷. It is not clear if the police complaint against Prasanna de Alwis was investigated or whether his name was cleared regarding the allegations by his superior officer.

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Additionally, eleven⁸ other witnesses interviewed by the ITJP named Prasanna de Alwis in their testimony. They allege he knew about the systematic use of torture in TID headquarters in Colombo and in TID's Boossa detention site in Galle, saying there was no way Alwis could have ignored the screams from detainees being tortured at night while he worked late in his office. One detainee alleged that Alwis tried to force him to give false testimony; another described always being made to kneel on the floor when he was taken to Alwis's office even though there was a chair. He is alleged to have slapped and threatened detainees taken to his office. Another man said Prasanna de Alwis ordered him to stop lying and left the room while four of his subordinates turned up the radio to mask the sound and beat him severely. Alwis returned and the witness says did not intervene when a subordinate ordered him to be placed in a stress position.

TID detainees described an interrogation room in Colombo equipped for torture with an iron beam in the ceiling used to suspend prisoners with ropes. He saw naked blindfolded prisoners being led to the room and said Alwis would sometimes go in and blame his subordinates for not getting more information out of the detainees. Detainees say everyone referred to Alwis as "Gota's man" and that officers senior to him deferred to Alwis as a result.

"TID was under the control of Gotabaya Rajapaksa when he was defence secretary; now the same cast of characters is being promoted which should ring alarm bells to anyone dealing with Sri Lanka," said Ms. Sooka. "We expect Leahy Laws to be applied to the CID which should not receive any US assistance. We also expect the UK government, which has been training the Sri Lankan police to stop any programmes with the CID. Additionally all sections of the United Nations should apply the same vetting policy to the CID, including the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and UN Peacekeeping."

Ends.

⁷ <https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-police-officer-arrested-over-plot-to-kill-deputy-11952/>

⁸ Ten cited in court documents; W315 interviewed since then.

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