

**STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF YASMIN SOOKA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF
THE INTERNATIONAL TRUTH AND JUSTICE PROJECT, IN DEFAMATION
MATTER WITH MAJOR-GENERAL SURESH SALLAY, HEAD OF THE
INTELLIGENCE SERVICE IN SRI LANKA**

We, the undersigned organisations and individuals, express our extreme concern and strenuous condemnation of the Letter of Demand in a potential defamation case against Ms Yasmin Sooka, a South African human rights activist and the Executive Director of the International Truth and Justice Project (ITJP), lodged by a military official, Major-General Suresh Sallay, the Head of the Intelligence Service (SIS) in Sri Lanka.

Major-General Sallay alleges that Ms Sooka and the ITJP made defamatory remarks against him and is demanding one billion Sri Lankan rupees in compensation.

We believe that the legal threats against Ms Sooka and the ITJP seek to undermine Ms Sooka's long standing reputation as a human rights defender and globally recognised justice advocate. The threats are aimed at intimidating Ms Sooka and preventing the ITJP from exposing human rights abuses during the Sri Lankan civil war.

Ms Yasmin Sooka is a respected human rights lawyer, activist and an international expert in the field of transitional justice, gender and international criminal law. Her expertise stems from a lifetime of defence of human rights and justice.

During the apartheid era, Ms Sooka was a member of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (South African Chapter), an interfaith body working for peace and justice in South Africa, and later served as its President. She also was a member of the National Repatriation Committee for South African exiles - a body which negotiated with the apartheid government to repatriate South African political exiles.

In 1995, Ms Sooka was appointed to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and served as the Deputy Chair of the Human Rights Violations Committee. Between 2002 and 2004, she was one of three appointed international Commissioners to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Sierra Leone, appointed by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

In July 2010, Ms Sooka was appointed to the three-member Panel of Experts advising the UN Secretary-General on accountability for war crimes committed during the final stages of the war in Sri Lanka. Later, Ms Sooka was later appointed in June 2015 by the UN Secretary General to a three-member Independent Review Panel, which investigated Allegations of Sexual Abuse by Foreign Military Forces in the Central African Republic as well as the UN Response to the Allegations.

In June 2016, Ms Sooka was appointed by the President of the UN Human Rights Council to chair a three-person Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, a post she currently holds.

Ms Sooka is the Director of the International Truth and Justice Project, Sri Lanka. She is the former Executive Director of the Foundation for Human Rights in South Africa, an independent non-profit Foundation established in 1996 by President Nelson Mandela's government and the European Union. The Foundation's aims and objectives are to address the violations of the past and to build a human rights culture in South Africa. Ms Sooka also chairs the Foundation's Task Team to deal with the "Unfinished Business" of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, addressing issues of criminal accountability and reparations for victims in South Africa.

Yasmin Sooka is one of the foremost global authorities on transitional justice, reconciliation and reparations, and was also one of the authors of the African Union's Policy on Transitional Justice. In February 2020, she was invited by the Security Council to address the Council as one of two civil society experts in the historic open debate on Transitional Justice.

We call attention to the fundamental principles set forth in the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, also known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. In particular, we would like to refer to articles 1 and 2 of the Declaration which state that everyone has the right to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at national and international levels and that each State has a prime responsibility and duty to protect, promote and implement all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The claims by a leading official of the Sri Lankan government against Ms Sooka are an offence not only against Ms Sooka, the ITJP and the broader human rights community, but also against many victims and survivors associated with her work. We express our serious concern at the threats against Ms Sooka in direct retaliation for her legitimate activities in defense of human rights and victims in Sri Lanka, more particularly, to her activities in support of truth and justice.

The accusations by Major-General Suresh Sallay against Ms Sooka are in violation of these fundamental international principles and constitutes an attempt by him to distract Ms Sooka and the ITJP from conducting its legitimate human rights activities.

We, the undersigned organisations and individuals, pledge solidarity with Ms Sooka and the ITJP. We call upon the Government of Sri Lanka to ensure that Major-General Suresh

Sallay desists from his threats against Ms Sooka and the ITJP, thereby demonstrating its commitment to accountability and respect for human rights.

Individual signatures do not denote institutional endorsement unless also included in the list organizations.

South African Tamil Federation (SATF)	South African Hindu Maha Sabha	Saaberie Chisty Society
Ms Premie Govender (Mpumalanga)	Advocate Ashwin Trikamjee	Moulana Yusuf Sayed

Transvaal Andra Sabha	Tamil Federation of Gauteng (TFG)	Christian Revival Centre
Mr. Ram Naidu	Ms Premi Govender (Gauteng)	Pastor Russel Abrams

Benoni Gujarati Hindu Seva Samaj	Uniting Reform Church in Southern Africa
Mr. Natvarlal Kalan	Rev Victor Lutchman

Via Christi Community Church	The Sungam	Thamizh Seva Sungam
Mr. Nithia Palani	Mr. Anand Munian	Guru Sumandran Padayachy

Ms Sophia De Bruyn	Ms Jessie Duarte	Ms Shanti Naidoo
Political Stalwart	Political Stalwart	Political Stalwart

Mr. Kista Moonsamy	Mr. Prema Naidoo	Ms. Shirley Naran
Political Stalwart	Political Stalwart	Secretary SATF

Ahmed Kathrada Foundation	Palestine Solidarity Alliance	Solidarity Group Peace and Justice
Mr. Neeshan Balton	Mr. Naazim Adam	Mr. Preggs Payachee

Ambassador M. Dangor	Mr. Krish Naidoo	Dr. Moorthi Sooboo
South African Ambassador	Human Rights Lawyer	Medical Doctor

Mr. Karthi Moothsamy	Mr Kuben Pillay	Dr. Yusuf Saloojee
Director of Companies	Director of Companies	PSA – SA

Mr. Lenny Chetty

Political Activist

Mr. Alex Bhiman

Religious Activist

Mr. Sathia Pillay

Cultural Activist

Mr. Sonny Moodley

Cultural Activist

Mr. Ravi Naidoo

Cultural Activist

Mr. Seela Naidoo

Cultural Activist

Mr. Jimmy Naidoo

Cultural Activist

Mr. Ahmed Saloojee

PSA - SA

Mr. Kova Parmal

Lenasia Thevaram School of Learning

Mr. Naweed Hassan

PSA – SA

Mr. Enver Mootoosamy

Activist

Ms. Audrey Peter

Activist

Ms Veena Naidoo

West Region TFG

Adv L. Sebastian

Activist

Ms. Brigitte Sequeira

Activist

Ms. Mikhail Brijmohan

Activist

Ms. Meren Chetty

Activist

Mr. Eddie Sabastian

Activist

Professor Firoz Cachalia

Prof of Law – Wits University

Professor Salim Vally

University of Johannesburg

Dr. Ismail Vadi

Former MEC Roads and Transport

Mr. Siva Naidoo

Human Rights and Socialist Activist

Nadas Pillay

Political and Cultural Activist