



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon
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Sam Tarry MP
House of Commons
London
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Your ref:

5 August 2021

Dear Sam,

Thank you for your correspondence of 22 July to the Foreign Secretary about human rights in Sri Lanka. I am replying as the Minister of State for South Asia and Minister responsible for Human Rights.

I recognise that achieving justice, peace and accountability is a priority for all those affected by the conflict in Sri Lanka. It is also a long-standing priority for the UK government, and we regularly raise the importance of justice and accountability with the government of Sri Lanka, both privately and publicly. We expressed our deep disappointment when the Government of Sri Lanka withdrew its support for the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) framework in February 2020. We have highlighted our concerns about the lack of progress towards accountability and the wider human rights situation, including in a statement to the UNHRC on 22 June. I have also raised the importance of accountability, justice and reconciliation on several occasions with the Sri Lankan High Commissioner and Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena, most recently during calls on 10 May and 17 June respectively.

The UK government led an ambitious new resolution on Sri Lanka at the UNHRC, which was adopted by the UNHRC on 23 March. This resolution, 46/1, provides a continued framework for international engagement on human rights in Sri Lanka, and highlights serious concerns about the situation, including those detailed in the recent report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). It calls on the government of Sri Lanka to make progress on accountability and human rights, and stresses the importance of a comprehensive accountability process for all violations and abuses committed in Sri Lanka. It keeps Sri Lanka firmly on the UNHRC agenda and requests continued and enhanced OHCHR reporting on the human rights situation and on accountability. Importantly, and for the first time, it also strengthens the capacity of OHCHR to collect, consolidate, preserve and analyse information and evidence to support future accountability processes. We have urged the government of Sri Lanka to engage constructively with the resolution in order to advance accountability and human rights.

We share your constituents' concern about the appointment of General Shavendra Silva as Army Commander. The British High Commission outlined our concerns in a joint statement with European partners when the appointment was announced in August 2019. With regard to sanctions, we are aware of the cross-party Parliamentary interest in this issue. The UK's Global Human Rights sanctions regime gives the UK a powerful tool to hold to account those involved in serious human rights violations or abuses through the use of an asset freeze and/or travel ban. We are grateful for the submissions by the International Truth and Justice Project (ITJP) and I can assure you we will keep all evidence and potential listings under close review. However, it would not be appropriate to speculate on who may be designated under the sanctions regime in the future, because to do so would reduce the impact of the designations.

We note the passing of the European Parliament resolution in June. The Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office works closely with the Department for International Trade to support the promotion of our values globally. The UK is clear that more trade does not have to come at the expense of human rights and our strong economic relationship with the government of Sri Lanka enables us to have regular and open ministerial discussions on a range of issues, including human rights.

The UK Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) includes an arrangement that replicates the EU's GSP+ tier. This is called the 'Enhanced Framework'. Sri Lanka was automatically granted trade preferences under the UK's Enhanced Framework at the end of the Transition Period.

Sri Lanka's receipt of Enhanced Framework preferences is subject to conditions. In addition to the general GSP requirements, these conditions include ratifying and effectively implementing 27 international conventions on human and labour rights, sustainability and good governance, and complying with those conventions' reporting and monitoring requirements.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. P. Ahmad". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P" and "A".

LORD (TARIQ) AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON
Minister of State for South Asia and the Commonwealth
Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict