



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Mercedes Villalba MSP
North East Scotland Region

Sarah Hulton OBE
British High Commissioner to Sri Lanka
389, Bauddhaloka Mawatha
Colombo 7
Colombo
Sri Lanka

15 November 21

Dear High Commissioner,

Review of Overseas Security and Justice Assistance assessment for Sri Lanka

We are writing to you regarding the review of the Overseas Security and Justice Assistance assessment for Sri Lanka which the British High Commission is currently engaged in.

We are increasingly concerned by Police Scotland's long-standing contract to provide a training programme currently including community policing, gender and sexual violence, and gender equality to the Sri Lankan Police. Police Scotland's role in training the Sri Lankan Police is providing political cover, unwarranted legitimacy, and a smokescreen for human rights abuses which are occurring in the country.

As you know, in January 2021 the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights published a report on Sri Lanka which described, "*the persistence of longstanding and endemic patterns of custodial deaths, use of torture and other ill-treatment, and extrajudicial killings by law enforcement officials with impunity, [as well as] credible allegations through well-known human rights organizations of abductions, torture and sexual violence by Sri Lankan security forces... including in the past year, which need to be credibly investigated*". There have been continuous media reports of human rights violations in Sri Lanka, including the use of torture and extrajudicial killings.

Our understanding is that Police Scotland's training contract with the Sri Lankan Police is due for renewal at the end of March 2022 and that any renewal would be subject to approval from the British High Commission. Given the real concerns which have been expressed regarding the ongoing violations of human rights in Sri Lanka, we hope that the British High Commission will reflect on the need for the OSJA assessment to be updated accordingly so that Police Scotland's training contract is not renewed, but terminated.

1.03, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh EH99 1SP

mercedes.villalba.msp@parliament.scot | 0131 348 6390

Facebook: [@LabourMercedes](#) | Twitter: [@LabourMercedes](#) | Instagram: [@Labour_Mercedes](#)



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In order to ensure that the British High Commission is properly equipped to undertake a review of the OSJA, we believe it is vital that the voices of human rights campaigners and those who have either fled from or are still suffering state-driven violence in Sri Lanka are heard.

However, the lack of transparency on this issue from the Scottish Government and Police Scotland has been alarming. Since engagement with the Sri Lankan police began in 2006, there has been little clarity about the content of the training, the units and individuals who are being trained, and its effectiveness in improving human rights. Both Police Scotland and the Scottish Government originally claimed that training with Sri Lankan Police had been suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic but did not later publicly clarify that a review of the OSJA had been underway since May 2021. They have failed to engage with campaigners or the victims of past violations and have not demonstrated any willingness to ensure that their concerns about human rights are heard as part of the OSJA review process.

As the British High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, we are sure that you would agree that the concerns and experiences of the victims of police abuses must be considered as part of the OSJA review process.

That's why we would seek clarity from you on whether submissions can be made to the review and the timeframe for the review process. The victims of police atrocities, human rights campaigners, and elected MSPs and MPs should be able to make their opposition to continued engagement with Sri Lankan Police on justice and security issues clear to the British High Commission.

Despite years of training and engagement by Police Scotland the human rights record of the Sri Lankan police has not improved. On the contrary, under the current government of Gotabaya Rajapaksa it is deteriorating. There has been no accountability for past abuses, and the Sri Lankan government has repeatedly made its opposition to accountability very clear. Given both Scotland and the UK's commitments to being champions of international human rights, we are concerned that Police Scotland's continued links to the Sri Lankan Police are inherently incompatible with these commitments.

We look forward to hearing from you on this important issue.

Yours sincerely,

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Mercedes Villalba MSP (North East Scotland)

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