

NEWS FROM SCOTTISH LABOUR

VILLALBA JOINS CAMPAIGNERS AND POLITICIANS FROM ACROSS PARTIES IN CALL FOR BRITISH HIGH COMMISSION TO ACT TO END POLICE SCOTLAND TRAINING IN SRI LANKA

EMBARGO: IMMEDIATE

Scottish Labour MSP Mercedes Villalba has joined campaigners and a cross-party group of politicians from across the UK in calling for the British High Commission for Sri Lanka to take steps to end Police Scotland's long-standing training contract with the Sri Lankan Police in light of ongoing reports of human rights violations in the country.

Campaigners and politicians share concerns that Police Scotland's role in training the Sri Lankan Police is providing political cover, unwarranted legitimacy, and a smokescreen for human rights abuses such as the use of torture and extrajudicial killings.

Police Scotland's training contract with the Sri Lankan Police is expected to be due for renewal at the end of March 2022 and any renewal would be subject to approval from the British High Commission. The British High Commission is currently undertaking a review of the guidance which governs overseas justice and security assistance programmes like Police Scotland's training contract.

In a letter to the British High Commissioner for Sri Lanka Sarah Hulton OBE, the campaigners and politicians call for the British High Commission to update this guidance to reflect the concerns about ongoing violations of human rights in the country and to prevent Police Scotland from renewing its training contract on these grounds.

The signatories to the letter also call for the British High Commissioner to listen to the concerns and experiences of the victims of police abuses in Sri Lanka. They urge the British High Commissioner to provide clarity on whether submissions can be made to the review of the guidance and what the timeframe for the review process will be.

The lack of transparency from the Scottish Government and Police Scotland is also criticised in the letter, noting both organisations' failure to engage with campaigners or the victims of past human rights violations in Sri Lanka.

Signatories to the letter include Leader of the Liberal Democrats Sir Ed Davey MP and Labour's former Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell,

Commenting, **Scottish Labour North East MSP Mercedes Villalba**, said: "I want to thank campaigners and those from across parties who have signed this letter to the British High Commissioner for Sri Lanka.

"Our collective position is clear; we want an end to Police Scotland's training contract with the Sri Lankan Police which we believe is providing political cover and legitimacy to a regime engaging in horrific violations of human rights, including the use of torture and extrajudicial killings.

"The Scottish Government and Police Scotland have failed to meaningfully engage with these concerns around human rights abuses in Sri Lanka, doing a disservice to the past victims of

human rights violations in the country. They cannot understand why the Scottish Government and Police Scotland's lofty rhetoric on human rights doesn't match up with their actions on this issue.

"The British High Commission is currently undertaking a review of guidance which governs training programmes like Police Scotland's current contract with the Sri Lankan Police. We are calling for the British High Commission to update this guidance to ensure that Police Scotland's contract is terminated, not renewed come March next year".

ENDS

Chris Barbour (*Research and Communications Officer, Office of Mercedes Villalba MSP*)

Chris.Barbour@parliament.scot

Notes to editors

(1) *Letter is separately attached to email received from Mercedes Villalba MSP's office.*