

Sri Lanka's disturbing actions met by 'deafening global silence' The Elders 3 August 2010  
The Sri Lankan government's clampdown on domestic critics and its disdain for human rights deserves a far tougher response according to The Elders. While welcoming the end of the decades-long civil war, the Elders say that meaningful progress on reconciliation in Sri Lanka is still desperately needed. They describe the international response to Sri Lanka's worrying approach to human rights, good governance and accountability as a 'deafening global silence' that may encourage other states to act in a similar way. (...)

Only the European Union has taken any direct action by suspending Sri Lanka's preferential trading access (GSP Plus scheme) for its failure to respect its international human rights obligations.

Among recent events that most concern the Elders are

- The persecution, intimidation, assassination and disappearance of government critics, political opponents, journalists and human rights defenders.
- Ongoing detention of an estimated 8,000 suspected ex-combatants without charge or access to legal representation, their families or independent monitors.
- The government's failure to withdraw wartime emergency laws more than a year after the end of the conflict with the LTTE.
- Lack of action by the government to address the political marginalisation of ethnic minorities that was at the root of Sri Lanka's thirty years of war.
- Unacceptable behaviour towards the United Nations — including a siege by demonstrators of UN offices in Colombo, led by a Cabinet Minister — following the UN Secretary-General's appointment of a panel of experts to advise him on accountability issues relating to alleged violations of international human rights and humanitarian law committed by both sides during the final stages of the conflict in Sri Lanka.

The Elders urge the international community and especially China, India, Japan and the United States to insist that the government of Sri Lanka takes the following actions:

1. Withdraw wartime emergency legislation and make a public commitment to uphold the human rights of all citizens of Sri Lanka, including minorities.
2. Allow immediate ICRC access to the estimated 8,000 people detained on suspicion of being ex-combatants.
3. Co-operate with the UN Secretary-General's panel of experts on accountability, including granting visas if requested.
4. Ensure that any prosecutions are based on evidence and not political expediency; cease political interference in the work of the judiciary.
5. Allow domestic and international NGOs and media to carry out their work in Sri Lanka without harassment, intimidation or undue restrictions.
6. Begin a meaningful process of consultation with people in the north and east of the country on land issues and economic development as well as constitutional reforms to address long-standing political marginalisation of ethnic minorities.

7. Ensure the security of United Nations operations and personnel.

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