

## **Sri Lanka: No Progress 4 Years On**

Human Rights Watch 20 May 2013      Respect for basic rights and liberties has declined in Sri Lanka in the four years since the government defeated the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). This week marks the fourth anniversary of the brutal civil war's end.

Since the end of the 26-year-long civil war, the Sri Lankan government of President Mahinda Rajapaksa has resisted taking meaningful steps to investigate and prosecute alleged war crimes by government forces and the LTTE, end the crackdown against the independent media and human rights activists, and stop ongoing abuses against suspected LTTE supporters. Government pledges to address the concerns of the ethnic Tamil population have gone unfulfilled.

“Four years after Sri Lanka’s horrific civil war ended, many Sri Lankans await justice for the victims of abuses, news of the ‘disappeared,’ and respect for their basic rights,” said Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “Instead, the Rajapaksa government has rejected investigations, clamped down harder on the media, and persisted in wartime abuses such as torture.”

Rajapaksa’s assurances to United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to investigate allegations of war crimes by all sides remain unmet, Human Rights Watch said. The government simply disregarded the Secretary-General’s Panel of Experts report, which found that up to 40,000 civilians had died in the final months of the fighting, many from indiscriminate government shelling. The government has similarly not implemented most of the accountability-related recommendations of its own Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission, which was called for by the UN Human Rights Council at its March 2012 and March 2013 sessions.

Since 2009 the government has increasingly restricted fundamental liberties, imperiling Sri Lanka’s democratic system, Human Rights Watch said. Government officials have threatened, and unknown assailants have attacked, members of the media, civil society, and the political opposition. Activists who advocated for the 2012 Human Rights Council resolution were publicly denounced and threatened by officials. The Rajapaksa government orchestrated parliament’s impeachment of Chief Justice Shirani Bandaranayake in December 2012 after she had ruled against the government in a major case. (...)

Tamils with alleged links to the LTTE remain targets of arbitrary arrest and detention, and are at risk of torture and other ill-treatment. Sri Lankan security forces have used rape and other forms of sexual violence against alleged LTTE supporters, as documented by Human Rights Watch in a February report. On the strength of the evidence presented by Human Rights Watch and other organizations, since 2012 several courts in the United Kingdom suspended the deportation of Tamils considered to fall within this risk category. (...)

Human Rights Watch urged governments to demonstrate their concerns for Sri Lanka's deteriorating human rights situation at the United Nations and other international venues. This includes continuing to press for an independent international investigation into wartime abuses, speaking out against ongoing abuses, and providing support for Sri Lankan civil society. (...)

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