

15 years of official peace

Report by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the lack of reappraisal and continuity of violence in Sri Lanka

Time: 5 June 11:00 a.m. | Overall event: 60-90min | The event will be held in English

Location: Senatssaal Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin Main Building, 1st floor, Unter den Linden 6, 10117 Berlin

2024 marks the 15th anniversary of the end of the decades-long civil war in Sri Lanka. In the last phase of the war, hundreds of thousands of Tamils were displaced within a few months and indiscriminately bombed from the air, ground and water, even in explicitly declared „no fire zones“, on a final remaining beach strip near Mullivaikal in the north-east of the island, creating a new example of global warfare in the name of counter-terrorism. Conservative estimates put the number of casualties at around 40-70,000 in very few weeks only.

To date, there has been only very limited investigation or prosecution of the events, which according to UN Secretary General's Panel of Expert are to be categorised as war crimes and crimes against humanity. Although the Sri Lankan government once again presented a draft law for a new Truth, Unity and Reconciliation Commission in 2024, the conditions for a credible truth-finding process are still not in place. Tens of thousands of families of the disappeared are still searching for their loved ones and are exposed to a continuity of intimidation, arrests and violence.

The recently published report by the OHCHR is the first to systematically outline how the lack of investigation and previous impunity for enforced disappearances prevents justice for the victims. The report describes the negative psychological, social and economic consequence for victims, including the families left behind, and the social trauma caused within the broader community. It examines accountability initiatives in Sri Lanka and internationally and describes how the continuing accountability deficit in Sri Lanka, together with the failure to implement comprehensive reforms, creates a risk of recurrence of the violations.

The results of the report will be presented at the event by Annemarie Devereux, head of the OHCHR project, and conclusions will be discussed.

Greeting by Niels Helle-Meyer, Vice-President of the Humboldt University of Berlin

Greeting by Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Keynote: Annemarie Devereux, Head of OSLAP at OHCHR

Comment: Tamil Human Right Activist WHRD, Sri Lanka/Northern Province

Comment: Andreas Schüller, Programme Manager International Crimes and Accountability, ECCHR



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