



Siobhain McDonagh MP

0207 219 4678 (tel)

0207 219 0986 (fax)

[mcdonaghs@parliament.uk](mailto:mcdonaghs@parliament.uk)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

LABOUR MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR MITCHAM AND MORDEN

Rt. Hon Mr David Cameron MP  
Prime Minister of Great Britain and Northern Ireland  
10 Downing Street  
London  
SW1A

22<sup>nd</sup> August 2014

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing in relation to this week's announcement by the Sri Lankan President, Mahinda Rajapaksa, that his government will deny visas to the UN team investigating allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Sri Lanka. I am sure you share my deep concern at his administration's on-going refusal to co-operate with this vital inquiry.

I therefore urge you:

- to reiterate your full support for the UN mandated investigation, as the only legitimate means to advance the causes of truth, accountability and justice
- and to call for the President to be suspended from his position as Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth.

I acknowledge the role the UK Government played in helping to secure the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) resolution on Sri Lanka, in March 2014. The mandate given to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms Navi Pillay, to "*undertake a comprehensive investigation into alleged serious violations and abuses of human rights and related crimes by both parties in Sri Lanka*" is an important move in the right direction. The atrocities committed during the conflict were appalling. President Rajapaksa heads a regime that most observers believe committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. Even now, nearly 150,000 Tamils remain unaccounted for.

At the time of the adoption of the UNHRC resolution you said that you hoped that President Rajapaksa "*will now seize this fresh opportunity to work with the international community to heal the issues of the past and to reconcile communities across Sri Lanka.*" He has failed abjectly on both counts.

The President has rejected outright the decision of the UNHRC, has called into question the integrity of Ms Pillay, and has refused entry to the UN investigation team. This could have serious ramifications for receiving witness testimony from within Sri Lanka. Mahinda Rajapaksa's recent decision to expand the mandate of the domestic 'Commission of Inquiry on Disappearances' and to appoint a council of international legal experts to advise the

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Commission on issues of alleged war crimes is not a genuine attempt to engage with international concerns on accountability. One can have no faith in the Rajapaksa's regime desire to uncover the truth when, as the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has said, "*past commissions of inquiry [in Sri Lanka] have not always completed their mandate, their reports have not been published and their recommendations have not been implemented or followed by prosecutions.*"

Given the Government of Sri Lanka's refusal to commit to an independent, international investigation that would lead to reconciliation, the situation in Sri Lanka is worsening. Since the adoption of the UNHRC resolution, we have seen some of the worst inter-communal violence in decades targeting the Muslim community in the south-west of the country, the unwarranted proscription of major Tamil diaspora organisations by the Government, a crackdown on the activities of NGOs and the continuing and egregious perpetration of human rights violations.

The fact that President Rajapaksa is the current Chairperson-in-Office of the Commonwealth makes a mockery of this association's values and principles. I commend the manner in which the Shadow Foreign Secretary, Rt. Hon Douglas Alexander MP, has sought to question the suitability of the President representing the Commonwealth on the world stage. In addition, Canada has led the way in raising concerns on Sri Lanka by not attending the 2013 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Colombo and in suspending its voluntary contributions to Commonwealth funds due to "*the absence of accountability for alleged serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian standards in Sri Lanka.*"

In light of current circumstances, the UK Government must reaffirm its backing for the UN investigation in Sri Lanka and take practical steps, including supporting a suspension of President Rajapaksa as Chairperson-in-Office of the Commonwealth, to show the Sri Lankan authorities that they cannot ride roughshod over international justice.

You have said previously that Britain achieves more when it stands up for its values. The terrible summer of violence we have all been witnessing, from Ukraine to Syria, Gaza and Iraq, highlights the need for principled leadership. I urge you to do more to hold President Rajapaksa's regime to account and to help send a powerful message to other countries that those accused of complicity in the violations of international human rights law and humanitarian law cannot avoid international reproach for their actions.

I hope you consider my views seriously. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

**Siobhain McDonagh**