

THE INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT AGAINST ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AND RACISM

PRESS RELEASE

SRI LANKA MUST TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION TO COMBAT RACIAL DISCRIMINATION BY IMPLEMENTING UN RECOMMENDATIONS

26 August 2016

We urge the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) to fully implement [the recommendations from the UN human rights body to combat racial discrimination](#). On 15th and 16th August, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)¹ met the Government delegation to assess its efforts to eradicate discrimination in line with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). It was 15 years after the last examination which took place during the time Sri Lanka was facing the protracted armed conflict. Today, for the first time after the conclusion of the armed conflict, the CERD issued a series of recommendations to the GoSL that would assist in the compliance with treaty obligations in its fight against racism.

With the Asia Committee, International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR) submitted a [report](#) to the CERD to provide alternative information on racial discrimination in Sri Lanka with a focus on the conditions faced by the Tamil population in the plantation regions, minority communities and the rise of religious extremism.²

The recommendations from the CERD cover a variety of issues in Sri Lanka, namely: Statistics; Definition of racial discrimination; Domestic application of the Convention and complaints; National Human Rights Institution; Prevention of Terrorism Act; Hate speech and hate crimes; Freedom of religion of ethnic and ethno-religious minorities; Tamils of Indian origin or "Plantation Tamils"; Situation of the Adivasi/Veddah people; Situation of internally displaced persons; Situation of minority women in war affected areas; and Truth and reconciliation.³

The CERD Country Rapporteur for Sri Lanka, Mr. Jose Francisco Cali Tzay, stressed in his concluding remarks at the dialogue with the Government, "*We very much congratulate the*

¹ CERD is the body of 18 independent human rights experts that monitors implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination by its State parties:

<http://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/cerd/pages/cerdindex.aspx>

² IMADR (July 2016), *Racial Discrimination in Sri Lanka*, available at:

http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/LKA/INT_CERD_NGO_LKA_24535_E.pdf

³ CERD (26 August 2016), *Concluding observations on the tenth to seventeenth periodic reports of Sri Lanka (CERD/C/LKA/CO/10-17)*,

http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/LKA/CERD_C_LKA_CO_10-17_24983_E.pdf

country for the commitment to peace in the country. And that's why we would urge you to pay attention to the situation of racial discrimination. Various bodies confirm that this underlied the armed conflict in Sri Lanka."⁴

"I recall the historic moment when the Citizenship Act was adopted following the previous recommendations in the year 2001. Similarly the recommendations of the CERD have to be linked to the overall efforts of reconciliation. The challenge now is to incorporate the recommendations into the on-going Constitutional reform process, thereby demonstrating the political will of the Government to uphold human rights of all, affirming non-discrimination, pluralism and equality." says Dr. Nimalka Fernando, Co-Chairperson of IMADR and a human rights defender from Sri Lanka.

Lasting peace and human rights in Sri Lanka cannot be achieved without addressing the causes for the ethnic and religious polarisation which affected inter-religious and inter-ethnic harmony in the country. Reconciliation and peace initiatives have to address racial discrimination which is deeply rooted in the society. We urge the Government to take swift and effective measures to eliminate racial discrimination based on the recommendations from the CERD. In doing so, the Government must work with civil society including victims, human rights defenders and NGOs in a transparent and inclusive manner. Finally, the Government needs to strengthen its partnership with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

⁴ UN Web TV (16 August 2016), *Consideration of Sri Lanka (cont'd) - 2469th Meeting 90th Session of Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination*, (2:50:28) at: <http://webtv.un.org/meetings-events/human-rights-treaty-bodies/watch/consideration-of-sri-lanka-contd-2469th-meeting-90th-session-of-committee-on-elimination-of-racial-discrimination-/5089683096001>