

## [Sri Lanka: High Commissioner condemns attacks against human rights defenders](#)

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ISHR joins the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in condemning attacks, harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders and other individuals in Sri Lanka cooperating with an investigation into allegations of gross and systematic human rights abuses.



(Geneva) - Sri Lanka must immediately cease intimidation and attacks against human rights defenders and cooperate fully with a UN-mandated investigation into gross human rights violations in the country, the International Service for Human Rights said today.

ISHR welcomed a significant statement on these issues made today by [UN High Commissioner Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, in which he denounced systematic intimidation of human rights defenders and other individuals](#) in Sri Lanka in connection with their cooperation with and testimony to UN investigators.

As noted by the High Commissioner, Sri Lankan civil society and human rights defenders have been subject to surveillance, harassment and other forms of intimidation. 'A wall of fear has been created that has undoubtedly served to deter people from submitting evidence,' said the High Commissioner on Friday.

The Office of the High Commissioner was requested by the [UN Human Rights Council in March 2014](#) to undertake an investigation into alleged serious violations and abuses of human rights and related crimes by both the Sri Lankan government as well as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE). The Council requested the OHCHR to 'establish the facts and circumstances of such alleged violations and of the crimes perpetrated with the view to avoiding impunity and ensuring accountability'.

In August this year, a group of [human rights NGOs voiced their deep concern](#) over disturbing instances of attacks and intimidation against groups believed by the Sri Lankan government to be providing information to this investigation process. A subsequent [NGO report to the Human Rights Committee](#) further demonstrated that such reprisals are not limited to those who engage with the investigation, but have also been perpetrated against civil society actors engaging with the UN treaty bodies, Special Rapporteurs, Universal Periodic Review and even the Human Rights Council itself. Documented cases of intimidation and reprisals ranged from defamation and smear campaigns to torture and enforced disappearances.

In its Concluding Observations on Sri Lanka issued in October, the [Human Rights Committee was clear when it came to reprisals](#) against any individual providing information, reports or testimony to the UN, reiterating that the Sri Lankan government has an obligation under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to 'protect them against any reprisals for providing such information'.

'State media, the ruling party members and pro-government activists have gone to great lengths to discredit this UN-led investigation process, rendering human rights defenders, victims and witnesses who cooperate with the investigation vulnerable to attacks from not only State but also non-State actors,' said Ms Pooja Patel of ISHR.

'International law is clear. The Sri Lankan government has a duty to cease and desist from threats and attacks against human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers and victims, to prevent and protect against such attacks by non-State actors, and to investigate and ensure accountability for all such cases,' Ms Patel said.

'The Human Rights Council, which mandated this international investigation, also has a duty to respond and to protect human rights defenders and victims. In this regard, we call on the President and Bureau of the Council to unequivocally condemn Sri Lanka's actions, which are not only incompatible with international human rights law but also undermine the institution of the UN Human Rights Council itself.'

ISHR