



அடையாளம்
கொள்ளக் கூடியவர்களுக்கான நிலையம்

Adayaalam Centre
for Policy Research

No.70, Manaltharai Lane,
Kantharmadam, Jaffna.
Contact No: 021 222 3132

website: adayaalam.org
e-mails: info@adayaalam.org

19 June 2025

His Excellency, Volker Türk
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights,
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights,
Palais Wilson, 52 rue des Pâquis, CH-1201 Geneva,
Switzerland.

Your Excellency,

REF: THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S VISIT TO SRI LANKA

We are writing in reference to your upcoming visit to Sri Lanka, scheduled for 23 -26 June 2025. Whilst we appreciate your Office's continued engagement with Sri Lanka to promote transitional justice, human rights and the rule of law, as well as your Office's willingness to survey the ground realities to this end, we are deeply concerned that this visit might be instrumentalised by the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL).

More than sixteen years after the end of the armed conflict, the GOSL has yet to demonstrate a genuine commitment to post-war justice and accountability. Successive governments, voicing the 'home-grown' accountability rhetoric, have done the bare minimum to deflect international scrutiny and evade accountability. This has been noted by the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and your Office, resulting in the establishment of the Sri Lanka Accountability Project (OSLAP).

The continued failure to deliver truth and justice for grave violations, particularly enforced disappearances, remains deeply concerning, as highlighted in your 2024 report on the issue. At this critical juncture, OSLAP represents the only hope for Tamil victim-survivor communities to achieve justice. With OSLAP's mandate set to be reviewed in September this year, it is important to recall that the GOSL has openly denounced both the Resolution and OSLAP during the 57th and 58th sessions of the UNHRC.

In place of meaningful accountability, the GOSL has proposed strengthening the Office on Missing Persons and establishing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. However, these institutions have been widely rejected by Tamil victim-survivor communities, who view them as politically compromised and devoid of power to effect meaningful change or deliver justice or healing to the victims. Our concern is that your visit may be used by the GOSL to project a false narrative of normalcy and progress, and to argue that domestic mechanisms are sufficient, thereby undermining the case for OSLAP's extension and even an extension of the resolution.

The new government elected in 2024 came to power on a platform promising far-reaching reforms, including ending the entrenched culture of impunity and fear, repealing the Prevention of Terrorism

Act (PTA), facilitating land returns, and advancing reconciliation. However, the GOSL has since reneged on these commitments. Specifically:

1. The Northern and Eastern provinces remain heavily militarised;
2. Activists, civil society actors and journalists are subject to pervasive surveillance and intimidation;
3. Large tracts of land continue to be expropriated, most recently under Gazette No. 2430 of 28 March 2025, which in effect will result in the declaration of 5,941 acres of land in the Northern Province as state land;
4. Buddhist monks, with the support of the Department of Archaeology and state security forces, are constructing Buddhist temples on contested and expropriated lands, openly flouting with impunity court orders halting the construction;
5. Not only does the PTA remain in effect, but the GOSL is actively considering new legislation that would restrict the operations of civil society organisations;
6. No comprehensive transitional justice framework based on the four pillars has been proposed; and
7. Even as new mass graves are uncovered, enforced disappearances and mass graves continue to be dismissed without thorough investigations by the government.

These serious failures clearly indicate that normalcy has not returned to Sri Lanka, particularly in the North and East. In light of these developments, we are deeply concerned that the current GOSL is perpetuating the same patterns of denial, repression, and impunity as its predecessors.

We therefore respectfully urge Your Excellency to use this important visit to highlight the persistent challenges faced by Tamil victim-survivor communities and to stand in solidarity with their ongoing struggle for truth, justice, and accountability. In this regard, we beseech Your Excellency to consider the following key actions:

1. Urge the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) to commit to the development of a comprehensive transitional justice framework, formulated in genuine consultation with, and the meaningful participation of, victim-survivor communities. This framework must be grounded in international human rights law, encompass all four pillars of transitional justice, and ensure international oversight and involvement.

As an immediate step, we urge you to call upon the GOSL to:

- Accept and fully cooperate with the Office of the Sri Lanka Accountability Project (OSLAP), including by granting access to its staff to visit Sri Lanka;
- Ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and incorporate it into domestic law with retrospective effect.

Additionally, we urge you to make clear that superficial gestures, such as establishing a truth commission when hundreds of recommendations of previous such commissions remain unimplemented, or inadequate measures like strengthening the Office on Missing Persons are unacceptable to the affected communities.

2. Stand in solidarity with the victim-survivor communities, including the families of the disappeared; recognise and endorse their struggle for justice and accountability, and call on the GOSL to end surveillance and intimidation of them.
3. Meet with families of the disappeared in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, and visit the Chemmani mass grave or other recently identified mass grave sites. Given that the families have been continuously protesting since 2017 and 23 mass graves have been identified, such a

visit would powerfully highlight the urgent need for truth and accountability in relation to enforced disappearances.

4. Urge the GOSL to adopt a comprehensive, transparent, and victim-centred policy for the exhumation of mass graves, fully aligned with international standards. This must include provision for international supervision and the participation of independent forensic experts.
5. Pay a symbolic visit to Mullivaikkaal as the site of a mass atrocity. This will provide reassurance to the victim-survivors of the final phase of the conflict that your Office recognises their plight and the need for accountability measures.
6. Urge the GOSL to repeal repressive laws such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the Online Safety Act, and to cease efforts to surveil and control civil society organisations. Any legislation that replaces these repressive laws must adhere to international human rights standards and must not serve as a surreptitious continuation of existing restrictions.
7. Impress upon the GOSL the importance of demilitarising the Northern and Eastern Provinces, immediately halt ongoing land appropriation, and expedite the return of lands previously seized in a manner that upholds the rights and dignity of affected communities.
8. Urge the GOSL to uphold the freedom of religion and belief, particularly in the North and East. This must include halting the use of state institutions to facilitate ethno-religious majoritarianism, such as through the construction of Buddhist temples on contested lands, and addressing the ethno-religious tensions this has exacerbated.

Your Excellency! By using your visit to highlight the ongoing human rights concerns in Sri Lanka, particularly those affecting Tamil victim-survivor communities, and by urging the GOSL to undertake the necessary reforms to fulfil its human rights obligations, your Office can play a pivotal role in advancing genuine progress on human rights and post-war accountability. On behalf of the Tamil victim-survivor communities, we implore you to give this request your serious consideration, for which we would be deeply grateful.

Sincerely,

Adayaalam Centre for Policy Research,
Jaffna, Sri Lanka.