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The Sri Lanka Campaign for Peace and Justice (SLC) was established in 2009, and formally constituted in 2010, to push for accountability for mass atrocity crimes committed in the final stages of Sri Lanka’s civil war, as well as the many other human rights violations that have occurred in Sri Lanka.

SLC’s work rests on our analysis that impunity for human rights abuses is the root cause of multiple cycles of violence in Sri Lanka. We believe that to prevent future violence and achieve lasting peace and reconciliation, individuals must be held accountable for the crimes they have committed.

We are not affiliated with any political or ethnic group inside or outside of Sri Lanka. We exist to fight for the rights of every person living in Sri Lanka, as well as all of those now living beyond its borders due to war, violence, and persecution.

Purpose of this document

This document sets out the strategy and approach that SLC will take to achieve these aims in the next three years (January 2024 – January 2027). We will review the strategy midway through this period to ensure it is still appropriate. The strategy has been shaped by an internal review and external consultation with SLC partners (both within and outside of Sri Lanka).
Accountability

To this day, almost no one has been held accountable for mass atrocity crimes committed during the final stages of the civil war in 2009, or the many other human rights violations committed both before and after. This is despite the findings of multiple UN reports, which have highlighted evidence of serious violations of international law by both sides to the conflict. A 2011 report by a UN Panel of Experts credibly estimated that up to 40,000 civilians were killed in the final few months of the war alone, mostly due to government shelling. Other casualty estimates have been significantly higher. Allegations of mass disappearances, extra-judicial killings, and systematic torture and sexual violence by government forces are yet to be addressed.

Meanwhile, there is yet to be a full accounting for the LTTE’s alleged crimes, which included the use of forcible conscription (often involving child soldiers), the use of civilians as ‘human shields’, and extra-judicial killings. Nearly 15 years on, victims continue to demand truth, justice, reparations, memorialisation and guarantees of non-recurrence.

Failure on Emblematic cases

Fourteen years on, victims continue to demand truth, justice, compensation, and guarantees of non-recurrence, despite attempts to intimidate and silence them. Meanwhile, minimal progress has been made in investigating and prosecuting the so-called ‘emblematic cases’, widely regarded as a litmus test for the state’s willingness to tackle impunity for serious human rights violations.

Shavendra Silva, General and accused war criminal
Accountability

Following the war, Mahinda Rajapaksa’s government continued to consolidate power in Sri Lanka. His government opposed any international investigation into wartime abuses, including one set up under UN Human Rights Council (HRC) resolution 25/1 in 2014, which found evidence of grave human rights violations during the conflict. The surprise Rajapaksa defeat in January 2015, and the election of a national unity government standing on a platform of ‘good governance’, brought some improvements in the post-war human rights situation. However, whilst this government co-sponsored the landmark HRC resolution 30/1 on accountability in 2015, serious rights violations continued, and the government ultimately failed to deliver meaningful accountability.

The Return of the Rajapaksas

The election of war-time Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa as President in November 2019 signalled another shift in the direction of the government. Upon entering office, Gotabaya rejected the previous government’s nominal commitment to dealing with the legacy of the conflict, both internationally and domestically. Frustrated by the lack of commitment from the Government of Sri Lanka, member states in 2021 passed UN resolution 40/1, creating a new body to collect, preserve, and analyse information about human rights abuses committed in Sri Lanka with a view to advancing accountability.
Sri Lanka’s economy, which had been slowly deteriorating since the Easter Sunday terror attacks of 2019, collapsed in Spring 2022. The ensuing anti-government protests, known in Sinhalese as the ‘Aragalaya’ (struggle), eventually toppled Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who was replaced by veteran politician Ranil Wickremesinghe. The country has been seeking international support, as it seeks to recover from the economic crisis, which could provide leverage to member states willing to demand accountability and transitional justice for both human rights violations and corruption.

In the meantime, serious human rights abuses persist under President Wickremesinghe. The current government has used draconian measures against peaceful protestors, whilst surveillance and intimidation of human rights defenders and campaigners remain a real threat, particularly in the North and East. The government has continued to use the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) to detain those arrested for protesting. The PTA has long facilitated torture, abuse and detention without charge or trial for extended periods of time. The government has twice proposed replacement legislation. The most recent one, the Anti-Terror Act, has been withdrawn amid domestic and international condemnation, with many in civil society believing it to be even more dangerous than the PTA. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has expressed concern that this bill, coupled with proposed legislation to limit online expression, could cause the human rights situation in Sri Lanka to deteriorate even further.
Organisational Aims

Following our organisational consultation, we have decided to revise our organisational aims to provide a clearer focus.

The Sri Lanka Campaign for Peace and Justice is a global, non-partisan organisation that aims to:

- Support efforts within Sri Lankan civil society to promote transitional justice and prevent the recurrence of mass atrocity crimes.
The Role of SLC 2024-2027

In our previous strategy (2020-2023), SLC identified itself as being one of the only international organisations which was:

• Non-partisan and multi-ethnic in character;
• Working exclusively on Sri Lanka; and
• Engaged in significant public and media outreach

SLC remains one of the few organisations combining these three qualities. It is because of this unique position that SLC continues to enjoy credibility among a broad cross-section of Sri Lankan civil society and the international community, and that its outputs are widely read and regarded as trustworthy and authoritative. At the time of writing, the SLC had a combined social media following of over 16,200 and a mailing list of 11,000 supporters.

External Consultation

During our external consultation in Sri Lanka and internationally, we asked what the purpose of the SLC should be going forward, and which activities would be most constructive in fulfilling our aims. The responses were varied, but the overwhelming consensus was that the SLC and international organisations more generally had a critical role to play in securing accountability for human rights violations in Sri Lanka.
Findings of our Consultations

We also asked partners what the role of SLC should be in the current climate in Sri Lanka. We also held an internal consultation. Critical points among what we were told are outlined below:

Materials

- Produce High-Quality, Easy-to-Understand Reports on Human Rights and Accountability for International Consumption

Focus

- Encourage International Organisations to Provide Material Support to Human Rights Activists
- Find Critical Connections Between Human Rights and Accountability Issues in Sri Lanka
- Focus on Corporate Responsibility
- Broaden the List of International Governments with whom we Work on Accountability
- Campaign for the Release of Sri Lankan Detainees
- Produce Blogs Highlighting Ongoing Human Rights Issues
Approaches

During the next 3 years, our work will be divided into four synergetic strands, similar to our division of work during the previous three-year period as sadly the overall aim of achieving accountability remains to be achieved:

Research

We will work in partnership with civil society in Sri Lanka to research and analyse past and current human rights issues under the broad headings below. Our research and analysis will underpin the campaigns and advocacy work we undertake.

- **Synthesising** publicly available information on human rights violations
- **Monitoring** militarisation and land confiscation in the North and East
- **Determining** pathways to advance accountability
- **Tracking** ongoing systemic human rights violations
- **Monitoring** increasing authoritarianism and restrictions of civic space

Campaigns

We will use our strength as an organisation with a large, diverse, and dedicated supporter base to run campaigns that influence the Sri Lankan government and members of the international community. Our campaigns will focus on:

- **Supporting** campaigns and initiatives by victims, survivors, and civil society groups
- **Encouraging** businesses with links in Sri Lanka to take a stronger stance against human rights violations
- **Proposing** pathways to advance accountability
- **Mobilising** the public to demand accountability for human rights violations
- **Highlighting** ongoing systemic human rights violations
Advocacy

We will use our research to inform advocacy work to achieve our objectives. We will strengthen our focus on states in the Global South and will strive to work in partnership with other civil society groups, where possible, to maximise our reach. Our advocacy aims include:

- **Supporting** individuals and groups at risk of human rights violations, including persecuted religious minorities
- **Coordinating** media and social media campaigns with our key organisational partners, maximising their impact

**Advocacy**

- **Sustaining** a critical mass of support among states for new and existing accountability processes – including in capitals and missions in Colombo
- **Coalition-building** at multilateral forums such as the UN Human Rights Council
- **Engaging** with UN mechanisms and bodies, including OHCHR, the special mandate holders, and the treaty bodies
- **Ensuring** that states engaged in bilateral and multi-lateral international engagement with Sri Lanka consider the human rights impact of that engagement.

**Building Organisational Capacity**

To ensure that we achieve our strategic objectives, and that our work is effective and sustainable, we will take action to build organisational stability, capacity, and resilience in the following ways:

- **Fundraising** to secure adequate resources to implement the organisational strategy
- **Strengthening** our governance structure to increase capacity and enhance diversity
- **Increasing** staff hours to maximise the impact of our work
Augmenting digital presence, including by a new website and increased social media usage

Reviewing performance data and measuring impact
Sri Lanka Campaign
For Peace and Justice

For any concerns, contact us at info@srilankacampaign.org