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Sri Lanka: Give all victims a chance for justice*Civil society calls on new government to join the International Criminal Court*

Bangkok/Colombo—Sri Lanka’s new leaders can restore confidence to a nation recovering from civil war and demonstrate that it is on the path to sustainable peace and development by joining the International Criminal Court (ICC), the Coalition for the ICC said today.

Six years after the end of Sri Lanka’s 26-year civil war and the failure of several international and domestic processes to address past abuses allegedly committed in its final stages, Sri Lanka must restore the confidence invested by victims and civil society in accountability by joining the ICC system of international justice.

In a letter this week to the recently inaugurated Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and President Maithripala Sirisena, the Coalition underlined that Sri Lanka can signal to its citizens and the international community that it is serious about breaking away from its past marred by violence and impunity by acceding to the Rome Statute. Sri Lanka is the September focus of the Coalition’s Campaign for Global Justice.

“If President Sirisena and Prime Minister Wickremesinghe want to gain the confidence of Sri Lankans and the international community, they must work to garner the necessary political will and capability to resolve the underlying issues that led Sri Lanka to almost three decades of civil war,” **said Amielle Del Rosario, Coalition Asia-Pacific regional coordinator.** “The Rome Statute will give Sri Lanka the opportunity to bring its domestic systems in line with international standards and would give Sri Lanka with international assistance to implement domestic legislation punishing the worst crimes.”

Despite public statements made by the government earlier this year about its plans for reform and reconciliation, and a six-month deferral for the release of the report of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on alleged human rights violations during the Sri Lankan conflict, local civil society is disappointed with the lack of genuine and demonstrable progress towards a credible process of accountability and reconciliation in which the rights of victims to truth, justice and reparations are finally respected. A recent agreement signed by the two major political parties in Sri Lanka one day after Wickremesinghe’s election also fails to reference addressing past and ongoing grave human rights violations.

“The international community should ensure that Sri Lanka should not be allowed to regress back to its ‘time and space’ strategies,” **said Niran Anketell, head of the legal and justice unit for the South Asian Centre for Legal Studies based in Sri Lanka.** “Sri Lanka’s record of domestic accountability throughout its post-independence history has been characterized by a lack of political will, lack of capacity, political interference and chronic failure. This is why

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international participation in any in-country accountability mechanisms is crucial,” **Anketell continued.** “For the new government to secure the trust of its citizens, Sri Lanka needs to break dramatically with the past. A process of attributing criminal liability for the most egregious crimes is a necessary starting point.”

“Sri Lanka’s new government has every chance to prove that it is committed to righting the wrongs of a difficult past. To be perceived as a nation that is serious about establishing a peaceful and just post-conflict society that upholds the rule of law, and is intent on safeguarding the rights of all of its people –justice and accountability must be at the heart of future reforms. Sri Lanka must sign the Rome Statute without further delay,” **Amielle Del Rosario added.**

BACKGROUND: The ICC is the world's first permanent international court to prosecute war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Central to the Court's mandate is the principle of complementarity, which holds that the Court will only intervene if national legal systems are unwilling or unable to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The Coalition for the International Criminal Court is a global network of civil society organizations in 150 countries working in partnership to strengthen international cooperation with the ICC; ensure that the Court is fair, effective and independent; make justice both visible and universal; and advance stronger national laws that deliver justice to victims of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. For more information, visit: www.coalitionfortheicc.org