

The Guardian

Sri Lanka Tamils subjected to horrific abuse after 2009 civil war, says report

Testimony gathered from 40 Tamils detained by Sri Lankan authorities documents sexual and physical abuse



Activists protest proposed UN resolution to investigate Sri Lanka for alleged war crimes: new report alleges abuse after war.

Photograph: Lakruwan Wanniarachchi/AFP/Getty Images

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Thu 20 Mar 2014 22.55 EDT

Horrifying details of sexual and physical abuse, including forced oral sex, anal rape and water torture, have been documented in a new report on Sri Lanka's treatment of Tamils after the end of the 2009 civil war, which includes testimony from returned asylum seekers and raises further questions about Australia's deportation of Tamils.

The report from the United Kingdom Bar Human Rights Committee, human rights lawyer Yasmin Sooka and the International Truth & Justice Project, details evidence of abuse from Tamils who say they were beaten with pipes, burnt with cigarettes and branded with hot

objects.

The report says the testimony was gathered from interviews with 40 Tamils who had been detained by Sri Lankan authorities. Almost all had suffered some form of sexual abuse.

According to the report, several of the victims were returned after attempting to seek asylum, raising further questions about Australia's close relationship with the country and the return of Sri Lankan asylum seekers.

“Since 2012 an ‘enhanced screening process’ for Sri Lankan asylum seekers has led to many being returned without having access to lawyers, or being subject to formal processing.

“The cases of torture, rape and sexual violence described in this report are just a small sample of those crimes likely to have been committed against Tamils,” Sooka said. “The international community must act now, otherwise such atrocities will continue to define post-conflict Sri Lanka.”

The release of the report coincides with revelations that the Australian government is continuing to resist international calls for a war crimes investigation into the bloody 2009 civil war, in which tens of thousands of civilians were casualties. Fairfax Media reported on Friday that the foreign minister, Julie Bishop, had confirmed Australia had not co-sponsored a draft resolution calling for an inquiry.

The Sri Lankan government has been the subject of a campaign for a war crimes investigation into the war. Claims of abuse of Tamils have continued since the end of the war.

The report describes graphic details of physical and sexual assaults. It says one woman was sexually assault with a baton, and endured seven gang rapes.

“He was very violent,” one of the men interviewed said of his captor. “I was angry and would try to fight him. I begged him not to. He said that the Tamil people’s mouths were only good for oral sex.”

Archbishop Desmond Tutu said he found it “horrifying” that almost half of those who suffered abuse had attempted suicide.

“This indicates the Sri Lankan government has achieved its aim in destroying these souls, who are unlikely to regain happiness and peace in their lives,” he said.

Greens senator Lee Rhiannon called on the Australian government to support the United Nations resolution calling for an international inquiry into Sri Lanka.

“How much more evidence of the continuing systematic sexual torture and rape of Tamil women and men by Sri Lankan officials does Foreign Minister Julie Bishop need before she will acknowledge that the brutality of the Rajapaksa regime needs to be investigated,” she said.

“If Australia fails to back the UN Human Rights Council resolution, which is reportedly being supported by the US, Canada, Britain and the European Union, we will have done a great disservice to human rights and justice.”

The report urges the United Nations representative on sexual violence to visit Sri Lanka and

initiate an inquiry into the allegations of abuse, and calls on the UN to suspend Sri Lanka's involvement in peacekeeping operations.

The United States and Britain had earlier expressed fears that Australia could be preparing to undermine moves for an international inquiry into alleged human rights abuses in Sri Lanka, according to sources reportedly involved in the preparation for an upcoming UN meeting.

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