
This self-perpetuating conspiracy of apparent plutocrats must stop: Prof. Wijesinha to NGOs

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Response of Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha, Secretary to the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights, to comments by non-Governmental Organizations in the Interactive Dialogue on Item 3 in the Agenda of the UN Human Rights Council “Sri Lanka is grateful to the Asian Legal Resource Centre for giving it the opportunity to clarify a misconception about our engagement with the Working Group on Disappearances. A loose reading of his printed text by the ALRC Spokesman gave the impression that we were ignoring over 5000 cases of disappearances. In fact, as ALRC knows well, and as the graphics of the Working Group make clear, the vast majority of these cases related to the period 1989 and 1990. Sri Lanka managed to clarify about half the cases reported for that period just before the introduction of the Ceasefire Agreement, through the sterling work of REPIA, the authority set up for rehabilitation purposes. Unfortunately, the government that signed the Ceasefire Agreement abolished REPIA, for reasons which ALRC may be familiar with, and the programme that had been set up for this purpose then broke down. This government has, with the support of the Office of the High Commissioner, developed a mechanism to go into the backlog, and we hope to deal with most of those cases in the next few months. More vital for our ongoing commitment to Human Rights are the recent cases, and in this regard it was unfortunate that our reports on the 32 urgent cases sent to us in the first few months of last year, though prepared in early September, did not reach the Working Group until December. Though the Report seems to have been finalized after the meeting of the Working Group in November, we once again request the Working Group to report at least in an Appendix that we did reply last year, while accepting fully that it was our fault that the report reached the Working Group three months later than it should have. Furthermore, while ALRC talks of 212 cases reported to the Working Group in 2008, the non-urgent cases were reported to us only this year, and we have already obtained police reports on these cases. Let me add that the police official dedicated by the Inspector General to work with us was transferred, and his replacement does not find it so easy to function in English. My own Ministry also has few officials able to work in English, let alone translate reports into that language. These are real problems Mr President, and well funded NGOs that sweep up the brightest and best of our youngsters should not confuse inadequacies with intransigence. That being said, Mr President, we will try to get the most recent report expeditiously to Geneva, while hoping that the Office of the High Commissioner will enable us to match NGO salaries and obtain more assistance to keep these NGOs satisfied, in the wonderful concentration of resources on answering their criticisms that the new NGO industry demands. Finally Mr President, whilst we appreciate your rebuke to the International Federation of Journalists and its associates for talking about their own little obsessions instead of addressing the issues with which this Assembly should be concerned, I would like to take this opportunity to express our anger at the belittling of serious issues that their approach encourages. They killing of the editor Lasantha Wickramatunga in January this year was an appalling act and it needs to be addressed, but it is an insult to Mr. Wickramatunga to link it with the topics under discussion. Secondly, while IFJ trots out statistics with the reporting period changed each time, it must learn to distinguish between more recent difficulties and the excesses of 2006, which we have explained elsewhere, while also explaining how we managed to get that situation under control once strong LTTE influence had been eliminated from much of the country. The spate of LTTE propelled disappearances during the Ceasefire Agreement period, of Tamils from groups that had accepted democracy but continued critical of the terrorism of the LTTE, disappearances which could not be reported to Geneva because non-State actors do not fall within the mandate of the Working Group, led to a reaction which we have made clear was unacceptable, and this has now stopped. Like Human Rights Watch, which with unlimited resources produced a glossy book of Sri Lankan disappearances in early 2008, only three of which related to 2007, IFJ too must stop trotting out age old figures that take attention away from the few real problems we now face. This self-perpetuating conspiracy of apparent plutocrats must stop, Mr President, and I hope you will ensure that we can go back to constructive dialogue instead of the finger-pointing that we sadly need to respond to, before it is broadcast indiscriminately by terrorist forces, which have only these particular cluster bombs now in their active arsenal.”courtesy: SCOPP