Secretary General replies to Alston and Ertuk

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Statement of Prof Rajiva Wijesinha, Secretary to the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights, in the interactive dialogue on the reports to the Human Rights Council of Special Rapporteurs Alston and Erturk Sri Lanka welcomes the reports of Prof Alston and Prof Erturk. Especially in the context of the former’s insights into witch hunts, we are especially grateful to the latter for not getting involved in the collective demarche of several of her colleagues in February. We hope that the vulgar generalisations, or sweeping criticisms, to use a transatlantic formulation, made last week, though purportedly on behalf of all Special Rapporteurs, did not seem to Prof Erturk to fall within the scope of her mandate.

With regard to Prof Alston, we are glad that finally we were able to meet him at length yesterday to discuss our concerns, and also to request his assistance for positive work for which we have at last got support from the Office of the High Commissioner, a full three years after Prof Alston made his recommendations. I am sorry that we met a categorical refusal for such assistance two years ago, when the witch hunt began, in an effort to establish an office of the High Commissioner in Sri Lanka that precluded any other form of assistance.We are sorry too that what should have been a fruitful relationship with Prof Alston, who is always entertaining and also instructive in spite of his broad brush strokes, was ruined by the leaking of his initial report three years ago. We totally accept his assurance that he was not responsible for the leak, but we request once again that that leak be investigated. We also request that the suppression of positive reports on Sri Lanka by the office be investigated, and I hope that you Mr President will be able to use your influence with the office to ensure that such delinquencies are not swept under the carpet.With regard to actual work, we were delighted to find that Prof Alston’s recommendations, and indeed those of Prof Nowak, the Special Rapporteur on Torture, who has always been helpful, were congruent with some of those of the Task Force on Human Rights Training for the Police. Despite long bureaucratic delays in Geneva, we were able to run a preliminary course with the support of excellent consultants from South Africa and the United Kingdom, and we hope that the latter will now at least support further work in this field. That would be a suitable initiative for the Donor Police Group, which did little – except for some excellent support from the Swedish Government – to justify its continuing existence over several years.Mr President, with the elimination of the most dangerous terrorist forces from our soil, we can now concentrate more on eliminating some of the problems we have had to face in recent years in upholding Human Rights. Not only Human Rights training, but training in professional techniques and in language, to ensure responsiveness to all our citizens, is essential. We hope then that, instead of further witch hunts, we will have positive dialogue and concerted support in areas in which we can see deficiencies. I am sure that, with his deep concern for witches, Prof Alston will prove able to restrain his colleagues from further depredations, and promote human rights rather than self-regarding exercises in finger pointing and worse. Courtesy: peaceinsrilanka.org