Sri Lanka government proves that the Channel 4 video is fabricated

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Consolidated Response of the Government of Sri Lanka to the Telecast by Channel 4 News of the United Kingdom on 25 August 2009 of a Video of Supposed Extra-Judicial Executions in Sri Lanka Background and IntroductionThe Channel 4 video purports to show the execution of two persons by supposed armed forces personnel. This incident was said to have taken place in the north of Sri Lanka in January 2009. Channel 4’s website on 25 August also carried an article by Jonathan Miller entitled “Execution video: is this evidence of 'war crimes' in Sri Lanka?” (see http://www.channel4.com/news/articles/world/asia_pacific/execution%20video%20is%20this%20evidence %20of%20war%20crimes%20in%20sri%20lanka/3321087). This states “Channel 4 News shows footage claimed to show Sri Lankan forces executing Tamils earlier this year.” Although the broadcast story states that the video was not verified for authenticity, the web article, significantly, does not note this except for one statement in passing towards the end of the piece viz., “If the killing field footage is authenticated, it will do little to reassure Tamil civilians.”
Reporting on the video on 26 August, the UK’s Timesonline website stated: “Channel 4, which broadcast the video, says that it was recorded by a Sri Lankan soldier on his mobile phone in January, when government forces overwhelmed the stronghold of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) at Kilinochchi.” (see http://www.timesonline. co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article6809968.ece). Many other international media outlets carried the story and rebroadcast the video in the ensuing days. Thereafter, several international personalities expressed their concern regarding the contents of the video. These included Norway’s international development and environment Minister Erik Solheim on 27 August 2009 (see http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/uriks/article3237855.ece), the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary, or Arbitrary Executions, Professor Philip Alston on 2 September (see http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/09/02/sri.lanka.united.nations/),US Ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice on 02 September 2009, (see http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSTRE5816IP20090902) and the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon when he met Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights, Mahinda Samarasinghe, in Geneva on Thursday 03 September 2009 (see http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20090903/wl_nm/us_srilanka_un).Minister Samarasinghe assured UN Secretary-General Ban that the Government would ensure that a thorough investigation into the video was conducted and that the findings of that investigation would be shared with the Secretary-General and others. This communication would include an explanation of what steps the Government had taken to clarify the position in relation to the video. The Minister also intimated to the Secretary-General that it was remarkable that such a video, if it was indeed recorded in January, should only now come to light several months later.The Source Channel 4 states that the source of the video is “Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka (JSD), which obtained the material and said it was filmed in January [2009]”. A web based search for this organization reveals that JSD does not seem to have issued any statements prior to 22 July 2009 and it may be reasonably inferred that it did not exist prior to that date. Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka established its web presence by launching a blog: jdsrilanka.blogspot.com on or around 01 August 2009. They have no material older than 01 August except for the 22 July 2009 statement which was posted on 01 August. There are other stories carried on the blog which mostly relate to media and freedom of expression-related issues and all are dated post-01 August 2009.Surprisingly the video carried on the JDS blog – that of the organization that is supposed to have distributed the original – is sourced from CNN. To give JDS credibility as a source, the Timesonline states that the video is from: “a group called Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka, which has previously issued statements through the Asian Human Rights Commission.” However a search of that organization’s website www.ahrchk.net reveals only one such statement on 10 August. It is also extremely difficult to verify if the address given by the organization in Berlin is genuine. When the video of the so-called “execution” was released on or about 26 August 2009 it was given wide coverage by many, obviously without any inquiry as to the standing of the source. Given that the organization JDS probably did not exist prior to 22 July, the GoSL finds it worrying that Channel 4 and the international media gave the video so much credence and carried it as truth without further verification. The GoSL is of the view that there are legitimate questions as to the provenance of the video coming as it did through a mushroom organization when there are other institutions with credible track records that could have been used to distribute it.Investigation and Analysis As Minister Samarasinghe explained to the media and the representatives of the international community on 07 and 08 September respectively, the GoSL condemns and dismisses in its entirety the video and its contents as being false and fabricated. This conclusion is based on the consolidated findings of four separate investigations initiated by the Government. Minister Samarasinghe recalled that such attempts at publishing fabricated video evidence of so-called “atrocities” were common during the final phases of the humanitarian operation which was successfully concluded in May 2009. A video was played at the briefing which showed Al Jazeera television carrying a story about the aftermath of Sri Lankan armed forces supposedly bombing a makeshift hospital in the conflict area. As supporting evidence, a recorded telephone call from a Doctor working in the area was played. However, the Sri Lankan army had conducted an analysis of the footage and pointed out numerous discrepancies which Al Jazeera was professional enough to carry in a subsequent news bulletin. After active operations were concluded, the doctor who was rescued admitted publicly that he was coached and threatened by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to utter the false statements that he made to the media. Three other doctors used by various international media outlets to support allegations of atrocities and supposed shortages of medical supplies during the final stages of the humanitarian operation, also publicly stated that they had been similarly coached or threatened by the LTTE. The Minister explained that as a matter of course the Sri Lanka Army had conducted an initial internal inquiry into the alleged incident and had found that the video had no factual basis. Four separate investigations had been

initiated by GoSL into the Channel 4 video and four presentations were made to the media and to the international representatives. They were a report by expert on video technology Mr Siri Hewawitharana of Australia (Mr Hewawitharana’s extensive experience, qualifications and credentials are carried on http://www.linkedin.com/pub/siri-hewa/5/494/5a8). Mr Hewawitharana’s report was read out by the Minister. Dr Chathura De Silva, Senior Lecturer in Computer Science and Engineering and Director, Centre for Instructional Technology, University of Moratuwa, Brigadier Prasad Samarasinghe, Chief of the Sri Lanka Army’s Signals Corps and Major A.P. Bandara of the Media Centre for National Security were the others who reported. The Minister pointed out that, while all four reports were fully consistent with one another, three main points of convergence was apparent on matters of great significance. These are to the effect that: the images were not captured by a mobile telephone but by a digital camcorder or similar equipment because the video is of high quality unattainable on a mobile phone (Channel 4 and several other outlets who carried the story such as Timesonline and www. Tamilnet.com, were categorical that the video was shot by a soldier using a mobile phone); there has been editing of the video and that the audio track has been dubbed and there is evidence that the format of the original video has been converted to make it appear that it was captured on a mobile telephone; if the video is an accurate depiction of an actual event, the gap in time evident on the video between the shot being fired and the sound thereof being recorded means that there would have to be a distance of over 100 metres between the discharged weapon and the recording device for the first shot and 38 metres for the second (at which distance a mobile telephone with a camera could not have recorded the images shown in the video).Conclusions Drawn The GoSL finds it remarkable that the obvious distortions in the video were not noticed by Channel 4 and that they did not seek further authentication of the video given the consequences of its telecast. Coupled with the fact that Channel 4 was unable or unwilling to substantiate the bona fides of JDS, and given that the story was one that was potentially damaging to Sri Lanka and inimical to its reputation, the organization’s conduct was unprofessional and unseemly. The Minister concluded that crude attempts such as that represented by the telecast of the video was a malicious attempt to play out a political agenda aimed at besmirching the name of Sri Lanka and denigrating the armed forces. It was also an attempt to impair the concluding of a thirty-year armed conflict under President Mahinda Rajapakse’s leadership, which has created conditions for an era of political stability and economic development. He urged any Sri Lankan elements involved in this effort to put country before self and to refrain from seeking to gain political mileage by such activity.Technical/Expert Analysis Maj. A.P. Bandara of the Media Centre for National Security then made a short presentation wherein he noted that when the video was slowed by 50%, several remarkable discrepancies and distortions became evident. For instance the leg of a dead person lying prone on the ground rises in the air when the first “victim” is shot. Thereafter the leg slowly drops to its former position. The second “victim”, though shot in the head, continues to have stiff leg muscles and reclines on his arms bound behind his back. Then he gradually leans back until he lies flat on the ground. One of the other “victims” who lies dead in muddy ground wears a remarkably clean white shirt. The “soldier” who supposedly kills the first “victim” is wearing a white T-shirt (vest) when the standard issue for Sri Lankan Army is of a different colour altogether. The second “soldier” has a very unmilitary growth of hair. Even though the bodies are lying in waterlogged or muddy ground, not all the “bloodstains” from the fatal injuries have spread in a manner consistent with one another. These were just some of the distortions and discrepancies that were noted to indicate that the video was staged.Dr. De Silva, who presented next, made the following observations: The granularity of motion vectors and other inter-frame features indicate that the footage had been originally captured using a high-end camera (at least a digital camcorder) and not by an average mobile phone. An analysis of the colour levels and saturation shows that the bloodstains in the film are unusually strong in colour and have texture mismatches - this is usually the result of post-recording modifications and the use of digital effects. There is no recoil or movement of the weapon discharged. Texture analysis of image and possible over-lays shows evidence of tampering /digital effects in relation to enhanced bloodstains and one blindfold Evidence of audio dubbing o Lack of audio synchronization - audio is delayed for more than 1.5 seconds - this is not due to video compression or processing. o Audio indicates presence of strong wind-noise. However, this is not evident in the video footage. Transcript of the Sinhala dialogue has no relation to the images in the footage. There is no audio of victims screaming or any other related noise. There was no indication that a zoomed view was used. Minister Samarasinghe then read out Mr Siri Hewawitharana’s analysis which could be summarised as follows: The total length of the video clip is 1:02.781 (min) The edited video stopped at 01:02.312 (min). The audio editing stopped at 01:02.125. This indicates that the original video is edited since original layer stopped at 1:02.781 and video editing stopped at 01:02.312 and audio dub stopped at 1:02.152. If it is the original audio, it should have played all the way to 1:02.781 and should not have 2 video layers indicating an original and an edited version. The audio is added later in a clumsy fashion. It is said that the video came from a mobile phone video source. There are only two formats in mobile video formats. One is the old 3GPP format and the new one is the Mpeg4, H-264 part 10 which is a MP4 format that is highly processor intensive encoding. Because of this, mobile phones in today’s market do not have high quality video capability since the processors in high end mobile phones like iPhones or smartphones are not powerful enough to capture good quality video. The Channel 4 video is much higher in quality than an existing smartphone can create today. Within H-264 coding there is also an extra component called Motion Vectors(VMC) which are used to predict motion on the temporal and spatial domain. Channel 4’s video has quite high quality VMC and it appears that this VMC came from a video camera and not from a mobile phone source. Moreover, video from a mobile source also tends to be blocky in nature when it comes to motion. Since the original video was originally in AVI and QuickTime format, the whole video indicates that the original video is of high quality that originated from a video camera source since mobile formats does not use AVI or QuickTime which are high quality video formats. If a change of mobile format to AVI or QT format is attempted, then the resulting video is likely to be of very bad quality. However, in this case the video is of very high quality. The foregoing indicates that someone transferred the camcorder video to a computer for

editing and sound was dubbed later. One can see that the gun shot was not in synchronization with the video. Normally audio is always ahead of the video since video processing takes more time and in this case audio is very late indicating very amateurish video and audio editing. Brigadier Prasad Samarasinghe of the Army’s Signals Corps who conducted both a technical study and field tests agreed with tthe preceding presentations and made the following observations: The video has been edited to include additional details that have been added or some details deleted. A wide angle camera was used to capture the “incident”. 30 frames at the end of the video stream only contained a letter “A” against a blank background. This is not consistent with an original video from a mobile telephone source. The video and audio streams were analyzed concurrently for consistency and several discrepancies were noticed which leads to the conclusion that the distance of the mobile telephone’s microphone from the weapon was 102 metres in respect of the first shot and 38 metres from the second. A field simulation test using several mobile telephone brands revealed that, in order to maintain the size of image in the Channel 4 video, the mobile telephone camera should have been at a distance of approximately 3 to 5 metres from the discharged weapon. Concluding Remarks Minister Samarasinghe in conclusion said that, on the basis of this investigation, the GoSL demands a retraction of the story and the video by Channel 4. He stated that he would also inform the UN Secretary-General, Norwegian Minister Solheim and others who had made statements in this regard of the true nature of this video. He said that Channel 4 and others will be challenged to prove that the technical and scientific analysis initiated by the Government was flawed and the scientifically arrived at conclusions are inaccurate. He concluded by stating that the Attorney-General of Sri Lanka would study all aspects of this matter with a view to taking appropriate measures, if deemed necessary, in the future. [ends] Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights 9 September 2009