
Government of Sri Lanka Responds to Prof Philip Alston on Channel 4 Video

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The Government of Sri Lanka welcomes the media statement issued today (17) by Prof. Philip Alston, Special Rapporteur on extra-judicial, summary or arbitrary executions, in which he now acknowledges that the report which was shared with him by the Government leads him to the conclusion that "the views expressed do indeed raise several issues which warrant further investigation before it could reasonably be concluded that the video is authentic". The Government of Sri Lanka also welcomes Prof. Alston's acknowledgement that the government's investigation has been prompt. The government regrets however, that Prof. Alston has characterized the professional investigation as not independent merely because the experts concerned were Sri Lankan. Prof. Alston does not appear to have carefully perused the Government's Consolidated Response of 09 September in which a URL to Mr Siri Hewawitharana's experience and qualifications was included on page 4. Contrary to Prof Alston's assertion, the Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights, Mahinda Samarasinghe, contacted Mr Hewawitharana on 05 September, several days after the short op-ed opinion piece in The Island newspaper appeared and requested him to provide the Minister with a more detailed analysis of the video in the form of a short report. The said report was received on 06 September. With regard to Dr De Silva, the sole reason for Prof. Alston's characterization of his analysis as partial is that he appears to have been consulted by the Government of Sri Lanka on previous occasions. The Government is of the view that it is quite legitimate to consult acknowledged experts from autonomous academic institutions and this in no way makes the expert part of the Government nor does it render the view tainted by bias. Moreover, the fact that Prof. Alston now acknowledges that the video needs further investigation to prove its authenticity is sufficient to establish that the work of the experts consulted by the government of Sri Lanka is credible. This also confirms the government's concern that Prof. Alston was unduly hasty in issuing his original press statement concerning the contents of the video in the absence of any credible material. It would be pertinent to note that the High Commissioner for Human Rights welcomed the Sri Lankan delegation's communication that a prompt investigation had been carried out into this matter. She also mentioned that, being a lawyer herself, she had thought it fit not to make a pronouncement on this issue until the authenticity of the contents of the video in question was established. The Government is of the view that any further comment on this issue by Prof. Alston should only be consequent to the receipt of fresh and cogent evidence that will enable him to conclude that the video in question is genuine. Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights 17 September 2009