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# Response to Amnesty International's Report entitled "Locked away: Sri Lanka's security detainees"

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The Government of Sri Lanka has been observing a disturbing trend in the run-up to the 19th Session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva. Many parties with vested interests have been carrying out anti-Sri Lanka propaganda in the form of discussions, reports and documentaries, with a view to exerting undue pressure on a small country which is undergoing a period of transition, following the restoration of peace, after a 30 year battle against terrorism. These attempts are very clearly aimed at garnering support for a Resolution calling for action against Sri Lanka, tabled at the current sessions of the Council and form a larger, politically motivated mala fide campaign with a view to soliciting unwarranted external interference and causing instability and chaos in the country thereby undermining the real gains made in the past several years.

Ironically this campaign is, according to its originators, allegedly aimed at helping post-conflict reconciliation through strengthening human rights and the rule of law. Sadly, these efforts ignore the positive developments achieved in post-conflict Sri Lanka, a nation recovering from the trauma of being afflicted by decades of terrorism. A most recent publication inimical to the Sri Lankan people is titled "Locked away: Sri Lanka's security detainees" by Amnesty International, an agency that has consistently tried to undermine genuine peace and stability in Sri Lanka. The publication seeks to downplay all advances made by the country in the protection and promotion of Human Rights. Amnesty International puts itself at the forefront of agencies supposedly concerned with human rights in Sri Lanka. It paints, in its "Report", a negative picture of Sri Lanka and conflates its argument by calling for an international investigation. While the "Report" acknowledges that the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission, did inquire into questions of arrest and detention and recommended specific remedial measures, it continues to assert that those subject to rehabilitation - nearly 12000 persons with varying degrees of involvement with the terrorist group - are "detainees". It also fails to acknowledge that as of 08 March 2012, about 11,000 including nearly 600 child combatants have been rehabilitated and released, leaving only an approximate 1000 in Protective Accommodation and Rehabilitation Centres. These persons were housed and put through various programmes based on a well-defined framework under the laws of Sri Lanka. The "Report" also fails to note that of over 4000 persons in administrative detention, merely 225 remain with the Terrorist Investigation Division. The purported testimonies and "witness accounts" appear to be largely self-serving statements from persons - now in receiving countries in the West - who need to provide justification for their continued presence in these countries, and hence speak of alleged atrocities and violation of their human rights, without the slightest compunction as to the accuracy of their statements. One hopes that Amnesty International has verified these stories by reference to local authorities or by checking if their "witnesses" had ever sought redress before national institutions. Many are given aliases or are unnamed. These purported "testimonies" raise obvious doubts as to their veracity. Few credible sources living in Sri Lanka are cited; most witnesses are residing overseas or are unnamed. If Amnesty International is able to provide detailed information on the allegations, the Government is willing to look into them and establish the truth. Amnesty International also repeats stories of secret detention facilities and detention at other places - outside the legally recognized framework. With the vast resources and knowledge Amnesty International appears to have at its disposal, it fails to name any one specific place at which secret detention was carried out. It also fails to mention that the International Committee of the Red Cross has confirmed in writing that it has been able to visit detainees in 2011. The failure of Amnesty International to mention these significant developments clearly reflects its mala fide intentions and ulterior motives. Amnesty International claims that persons were remanded at Welikada Prison without judicial process - which is an impossibility. Amnesty International does not appear to have exercised the slightest caution about accepting some of these "witness accounts" nor subjected them to the most cursory of examinations. It appears that anything and everything negative about Sri Lanka and the Government, has been hastily cobbled together, admixed with imagined historical data, given a twist that supports Amnesty International's slant or bias (or that of their sponsors), and published. Perhaps most egregious of all is the complete failure to acknowledge the Government's own National Action Plan for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, which scarcely receives mention. In fact, on 01 March 2012, a detailed presentation was made by the Government outlining the Action Plan's focus on issues such as torture, disappearance, detention and related issues. Amnesty International was present on the occasion. It appears that to Amnesty International, such developments are to be studiously ignored, as long as they represent positive news about Sri Lanka. It is all the more astonishing and appalling that Amnesty International has very conveniently ignored or deliberately avoided mention of the many positive developments and progress made during the past 3 years, since the conclusion of the humanitarian operation. The people in the conflict-affected areas and, in particular, in the North and the East, have commenced leading normal lives - which they could not enjoy during the 3 decades of terrorism in Sri Lanka. Children have returned to school without the fear of being recruited as child soldiers, civilians have recommenced their businesses, transport systems have been restored and people are free to travel without restriction. It is this singularly unfortunate disservice to the truth and lack of genuine concern for human rights protection and promotion by Amnesty International that is especially lamentable. Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations Geneva, Switzerland 15th March 2012