



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
26 February 2024

English only

---

## Human Rights Council

### Fifty-fourth session

11 September–13 October 2023

Agenda item 2

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner  
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the  
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Association des étudiants tamouls de France, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 August 2023]

---

\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



## **Acts of Genocide in Sri Lanka: Remembering the Sencholai Massacre 17 Years On**

Last 14th August marks the 17th anniversary of the massacre of 53 school girls by the Sri Lankan Air Force. According to reports received thus far 53 children – all girls – students in GCE (O/L) and GCE (A/L) classes in different schools in Mullaitheevu have been killed as a result of heavy aerial bombardment by Kfir jet bombers of the Sri Lankan Air Force, around 7am this morning on the premises of the “Sencholai” at Vallipunam, on the Paranthan – Mullaitheevu Road, at Mullaitheevu. Over 150 other children, all girls, also students in GCE O/L and GCE (A/L) classes in different schools in Mullaitheevu have been seriously injured in the course of the same aerial bombardment at the same place. It is feared that the number of deaths would increase.

On August 14 2006, four Sri Lankan air force jets flew over the Vanni and dropped sixteen bombs over the Sencholai children's home for orphans, killing 53 school girls and 3 teachers.

The children's home had been designated a humanitarian zone and its GPS coordinates had been passed to the Sri Lankan military via the UN children's agency, UNICEF, and the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC).

As news of the massacre broke, the Sri Lankan government initially denied the bombing had taken place. It later claimed it had bombed a training camp of the Liberation Tigers (LTTE) and killed “50-60 terrorists.”

“We have studied this for three years and know what was going on,” claimed Sri Lankan government spokesperson Keheliya Rambukwella.

“If the children are terrorists, what can we do? The fact is that gender or the age limit is of no concern when it comes to training and when it comes to soldiers, because they are carrying arms in order to kill the enemy.”

That claim was rejected by international ceasefire monitors of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) and UNICEF.

“These children are innocent victims of violence,” said Ann M. Veneman, Executive Director of UNICEF said in a statement. UNICEF's Colombo chief, Joanna VanGerpen told reporters: “we don't have any evidence that they are LTTE cadres... From what we understand at this point, these children were from surrounding communities.”

UNICEF staff from a nearby office immediately visited the compound to assess the situation and to provide fuel and supplies for the hospital as well as counselling support for the injured students and the bereaved families.

Ms Van Gerpen told reporters, “We visited the site and saw severed limbs that were there”. Speaking to the BBC, she also said, “We did see more than 100 [wounded] in the local hospitals, some with loss of limbs, head and shrapnel injuries.”

The home, which had been used to house girls who had lost one or more parents, was part of a campus of four orphanages which also includes a home for the severely disabled, a home for boys, and a children's home. Despite the fact that the area was a humanitarian zone and whose location had been registered with the ICRC and communicated to the Government of Sri Lanka, the Government claimed afterwards that the target they had bombed was a military installation. Their claims were directly refuted by Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission (SLMM) then-head Ulf Henricsson who said, after visiting the site, that they could not find “any evidence of military installations or weapons” and that “It was not a military installation, we can see [that].” Further aerial attacks, such as the November 2nd bombing of the Kilinochchi General Hospital, despite the hospital being clearly distinguishable by the universal symbol of the red cross painted on its roof. The government's attempts to justify these attacks on demarcated humanitarian zones evidences the international accusations of disregard for international law and human rights.

The Government of Sri Lanka must desist from deliberately bombing civilian targets. Each attack that is not criticized by the international community merely gains tacit support for the Sri Lankan government's continual bombardment campaigns. It is reprehensible for a government to kill civilian targets, especially its own citizens. Thus, we are calling upon you to urge the State Department to hold the Sri Lankan government accountable for all its attacks on civilian targets, including children's homes, hospitals, schools and markets. The United States of America's government should withdraw military and humanitarian aid to the Government of Sri Lanka until it respects international norms of human rights.

SLMM monitors said they found at least 10 bomb craters and an unexploded bomb at the site.

A survivor of the attack, Paranthan Hindu Mahavidyalam student Mary Arulappan Juliet, recalled the horror of the massacre, in an interview just days later.

"As the bombs fell, the girls ran in all directions, and took cover by lying on the ground face down, hoping that the bombers will go away after attacking once. But the Kfir jets returned firing additional munitions directed to our facility," she said.

"There was chaos within the Sencholai premises with each round of bombing, as more students were getting wounded severely and getting killed. In between air strikes, the girls changed their cover locations by running to other positions to take better cover".

"In the aerial strikes, many died on the spot, and many were wounded, most had multiple injuries, some lost their limbs, some had severe burns. All the girls were pleading for help, pleading to be taken to a hospital."

The attack drew outrage from Tamils in the North-East and across the world. Protests and vigils were held across Europe, including in London, Geneva, Palermo and Oslo as well as in South Africa.

Meanwhile protests were held across the Tamil homeland, with hartals in Vavuniya, Trincomalee and Mannar.

The Tamil Nadu State Assembly passed a resolution stating the bombing was an "uncivilised and inhumane act", with members of the Dalit Panthers of India (DPI) walking out of the legislature later in protest against the Indian government's silence over the attack. Parties across the political divide condemned the attack, with Former Chief Minister Karunanidhi saying the killing was "atrocious" and Tamil Nadu Electricity Minister Arcot N Veerasamy warning, "No political party in the state will accept the brutalities meted out to the Tamils by the island government".

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan was described by a spokesman as "profoundly concerned at the rising death toll including reports of dozens of students killed in a school as a result of air strikes in the northeast."

However, the air strike on the schoolgirls did not draw condemnation from the Co-Chairs of the peace process - the United States of America, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, EU and Norway.

The Swiss government described the bombing as "an outrage."

In a statement, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) said: "The heavy aerial bombardment on the premises clearly indicates that the attack was premeditated, deliberate and vicious. The heavy repeated aerial bombardment of the same premises clearly indicates the bombing was definitely not accidental. The ferocity of the attack clearly indicates that its objective was to cause the maximum possible casualties. The objective was to kill the maximum number of Tamil children.

"We appeal on behalf of the Tamil speaking civilian population to the International Community particularly to India, to take the earliest possible action to stop the Sri Lankan State from proceeding with its genocidal program."

This attack is not merely atrocious and inhuman - it clearly has a genocidal intent. It is yet another instance of brazen State Terrorism. In yet another incident, displaced Tamil civilians who had taken refuge at the Philip Neriya Church at Allaipiddy came under heavy artillery fire around midnight on Saturday the 12th of August 2006. Over 25 Tamil civilians were killed by this attack and over 50 other Tamil civilians grievously injured.

The government's indiscriminate aerial bombardment and artillery shelling has in the recent past caused heavy civilian casualties in several parts of the Tamil Eelam in Northeastern region.

To this day, no one has been held accountable for the massacre that took place 17 years ago. And Eelam Tamils don't have any faith on Sri Lankan domestic process.

We call upon the UNHRC members, other affiliated UN agencies and member of states to:

- a. Recognize the genocide resolution passed unanimously in the Northern Provincial Council of Sri Lanka on 10th February in 2015.
- b. Direct appropriate measures at the International Criminal Court outlining that the affected Tamil people have no faith in any domestic commission or inquiry.
- c. Council Members to have a new Resolution under Agenda 4 to appoint a special Rapporteur to monitor and investigate ongoing human rights violations and repression against the Tamil people.
- d. conducting an internationally monitored Referendum.
- e. We call on the European Commission to stop being complicit in the genocide against the Tamil people and to suspend all aid and benefits such as the Generalized System of Preferences Plus (GSP+) granted to Sri Lanka.

To the 4th committee members of General Assembly

- To recognize that Tamil territories are not governing by Tamils

---

Action contre les Violations des Droits Humains, ACTION DE LA JEUNESSE POUR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT DURABLE, Action des Chrétiens Pour les droits de l'homme, Action des chrétiens pour les Droits Humains, Action for education and the Promotion of women, Action for Protection of Child Rights, Action pour la Protection des Droits de l'Enfant, Action Pour l'Education au Développement Durable et aux Droits Humains, ACTIONS ECOLOGIQUES FRANÇAISES, ACTIONS POUR LA PROTECTION ET LA DEFENSE DES DROITS DE L'HOMME, Advocates for Justice and Human Rights, ADVOCATES FOR JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS, Advocates for Peace and Human Rights, Agence Internationale des Droits de l'Homme, AJACCIO HUMAN RIGHTS CENTER, ALLIANCE DES JURISTES POUR LES DROITS DE L'HOMME, ALLIANCE INTERNATIONALE CONTRE LE GENOCIDE DES TAMOULS, Alliance Internationale de Défense des Droits Humains, Alliance Internationale des Objectifs du Développement Durable, ALLIANCE INTERNATIONALE POUR LA JUSTICE, ALLIANCE POUR LA JUSTICE INTERNATIONALE (AJI), ASSOCIATION CARITATIVE ETUDIANTE POUR LA JEUNESSE, ASSOCIATION DE DEFENSE DES DROITS DE L'HOMME, ASSOCIATION DE DEFENSE DES DROITS HUMAINS EN SORBONNE, ASSOCIATION DE DEFENSE ET DE PROMOTION DES DROITS DE L'HOMME, ASSOCIATION DES CHRETIENS TAMOULS DE FRANCE, ASSOCIATION DES DROITS DE L'HOMME DE CHARENTE, ASSOCIATION DES ETUDIANTS POUR LES DROITS DE L'HOMME ASEDH., ASSOCIATION DES JEUNES DE LA DIASPORA TAMOUL, ASSOCIATION FEMMES DE LA MEDIATION, Association for Independence of Judges and Lawyers, Association Humaniste de France, Association International pour le Développement Economique et Social, ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DES DROITS DE L'HOMME, ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DES JOURNALISTES INDEPENDANTS , ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DES JOURNALISTES TAMOULS, ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE POUR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT ECONOMIQUE ET SOCIAL DU TAMIL EELAM , ASSOCIATION POUR LA DEFENSE DES DROITS DES CITOYENS - A.D.D.C., ASSOCIATION SOLIDARITE SANS FRONTIERE ET D'EDUCATION, Center for Human Rights

and advocacy, CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER ASSOCIATION, CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, CENTRE D'ACCÈS POUR LES DROITS DE L'HOMME, CENTRE DE PROTECTION DE TAMIL EELAM, CENTRE EUROPÉEN POUR LA PAIX ET JUSTICE, Centre for Advocacy and Human Development, Centre for Human Rights Advocacy, Centre for Human Rights Defenders (CHRD), CENTRE INTERNATIONAL DE RECHERCHE SUR LA PAIX ET JUSTICE, CENTRE INTERNATIONAL DES ÉTUDES STRATÉGIQUES ET POLITIQUES, Centre Tamoul pour les droits de l'homme et la démocratie, COALITION OF WORLD TAMIL ORGANIZATIONS CONSEIL NATIONAL DES DROITS DE L'HOMME ET DU CITOYEN, COORDINATION INTERNATIONALE DES DROITS DE L'HOMME, EUROPEAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, EUROPEAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS STUDIES, Europeans Tamils for Justice and Peace, Fédération internationale des Commerçants Tamouls, Fédération internationale des femmes unies, Federation of Global Tamil Organizations, FORUM FOR THE DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS FRANCE FDHR, French for Democracy & Human Rights, FRIENDS OF INDIA SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL-FRANCE, Global health & human rights, INSTITUT INTERNATIONAL DES DROITS DE L'HOMME, INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE AGAINST TAMILS GENOCIDE AND FREE TAMIL EELAM, International Alliance for the Defense of Human Rights, International Center for Peace and Justice - ICPJ, INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR RIGHT TO SELF DETERMINATION, INTERNATIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE TAMIL EELAM, International Federation for Child Rights, INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF HUMAN RIGHTS STUDIES, International United Women Federation, LE COLLECTIF LA PAIX AU SRI LANKA, LIGUE EUROPEENNE POUR LA PROTECTION DES DROITS DE L'HOMME , MAISON DES CITOYENS DU MONDE, MEDIAS POUR LA PAIX ET JUSTICE, NORTH-EAST DEVELOPPMENT AGENCY, North-East Secretariat on Human Rights, Réseau International pour les Droits de l'Homme et de l'Etat de Droit, Solidarité Internationale pour le Développement, STUDENTS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, TAMIL EELAM PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE, World Tamil Parliamentarians Association, Youth Action for Development and Human Rights, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.