

117TH CONGRESS
2^D SESSION

H. RES. 1493

Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives in support of the peaceful democratic and economic aspirations of the people of Sri Lanka.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NOVEMBER 25, 2022

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives in support of the peaceful democratic and economic aspirations of the people of Sri Lanka.

Whereas, for more than 30 years, Sri Lanka was enveloped in a civil war, the root causes of which remain largely unresolved;

Whereas more than 100,000 Sri Lankans died, were forcibly disappeared, or went missing during the ethnic conflict, most acutely during the final months of the war in 2009;

Whereas, at the end of the visit by the United Nations Secretary General in May 2009, the Sri Lankan Government leaders gave assurances on accountability, and the country's leaders had an opportunity to create a sustainable peace, but failed to do so;

Whereas the period following the war's end contributed to Sri Lanka's economic growth and development, but heavy militarization of the north and east Provinces continued and underlying structural problems remained;

Whereas, in March 2015, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted resolution HRC 30/1, with the concurrence of the Sri Lankan Government, laying out a transitional justice process for accountability and reconciliation, but successive governments failed to implement key aspects of the resolution, and in March 2020, the Gotabaya Rajapaksa administration withdrew its commitments to implement the resolution;

Whereas, on August 8, 2020, Human Rights Watch described President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's rule in 2020 as "a campaign of fear and intimidation against human rights activists, journalists, lawyers, and others challenging government policy";

Whereas, despite continued calls on the Government of Sri Lanka by the United States, India, and other friends of Sri Lanka to address longstanding issues of accountability and reconciliation related to the root causes of the country's ethnic conflict, many of the underlying issues remain unaddressed, including impunity for human rights violations and alleged war crimes;

Whereas Sri Lanka's current economic crisis caused millions of Sri Lankan citizens to live in extremely dire conditions, with severe shortages of medicine, food, and fuel;

Whereas numerous factors contributed to Sri Lanka's economic crisis, including corruption, the government's own financial mismanagement, the lack of postwar security sector reform, outsized expenditures on the military, com-

mercial debt, expensive projects—sometimes paid for by unrealistically adverse termed debt funded by the People’s Republic of China, the April 2019 Easter bombings, and the global coronavirus pandemic;

Whereas the United States Agency for International Development announced more than \$92,000,000 in economic and humanitarian assistance to Sri Lanka since June 2022;

Whereas the Government of India has provided more than \$3,500,000,000 in lines of credit to the Government of Sri Lanka for food, medicine, and fuel and the Governments of Japan and Australia have provided urgent medicine, food, and health care assistance for the Sri Lankan people;

Whereas the Government of Sri Lanka failed to make its bond and loan payments in April 2022, resulting in the country’s first financial default in May 2022;

Whereas tens of thousands of Sri Lankan citizens rallied in largely peaceful protests lasting more than 100 days and on July 9, 2022, the government responded with live fire and tear gas;

Whereas the events of July 9, 2022, demonstrated that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa lost the confidence of the people of Sri Lanka;

Whereas, on July 20, 2022, following the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the Parliament of Sri Lanka elected Ranil Wickremesinghe as President of Sri Lanka;

Whereas the Government of Sri Lanka has thus far failed to respond to public concerns, including the establishment of transparent investigations into credible allegations of corruption and human rights violations;

Whereas the Sri Lankan Government continues to use heavy-handed instruments of the state to silence dissent and protest, and has implemented and used the country's Prevention of Terrorism Act to target peaceful political opposition, detain indefinitely without charge, and harass minorities, activists, and journalists;

Whereas the Sri Lankan Government continues to participate in and promote illegal land appropriation in traditional minority areas, including of Tamils and Muslims;

Whereas the United States cosponsored United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 46/1 (2021), which includes strengthening the capacity of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to collect, analyze, and preserve information and evidence for future accountability processes for gross violations of human rights in Sri Lanka;

Whereas United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, issued a report on February 25, 2022, noting setbacks in efforts to hold individuals accountable for human rights violations in Sri Lanka and highlighting the need for “deeper institutional and security sector reforms that will end impunity and prevent the recurrence of violations of the past”;

Whereas the September 2022 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Report on Sri Lanka stated, “[f]or sustainable improvements to take place, however, it is vital to recognize and address the underlying factors which have contributed to the economic crisis, including embedded impunity for past and present human rights violations, economic crimes, and endemic corruption”;

Whereas President Wickremesinghe announced that Sri Lanka—

(1) would restart bailout negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in August 2022; and

(2) had reached an initial agreement with the IMF on September 1, 2022; and

Whereas, under United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 51/1 (2022), the United Nations Human Rights Council extended and reinforced the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' mandate from United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 46/1 (2021) for an additional 2 years: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

2 (1) supports the peaceful democratic and economic aspirations of the people of Sri Lanka;

3 (2) urges the Sri Lankan Government and security forces to respect the rights of Sri Lankans, particularly minority peoples, including to protest peacefully without fear of reproach;

4 (3) urges Sri Lankan President
5 Wickremesinghe to reach a consensus on major
6 issues with opposition parties on behalf of all Sri
7 Lankans, including Tamils, Indian-origin Tamils,
8 Muslims, and other religious and ethnic minorities to
9 address longstanding issues, including relating to
10 human rights, disenfranchisement, accountability,
11 and reconciliation, and work toward a political solution;
12
13
14
15
16

1 (4) calls on the Government of Sri Lanka to
2 promote an inclusive, pluralistic vision for Sri Lanka
3 through implementing significant structural reforms
4 and confidence-building measures to address corrup-
5 tion and vulnerabilities that hamper Sri Lanka's
6 long-term potential growth, including outsized ex-
7 penditures on the military;

8 (5) urges the Sri Lankan Government to repeal
9 the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which is used to
10 target peaceful political opposition and detain indefi-
11 nitely without charge and harass minorities, activ-
12 ists, and journalists;

13 (6) calls for the immediate halting of land ap-
14 propriation by the Sri Lankan Government and the
15 restitution of appropriated lands;

16 (7) urges the United Nations Human Rights
17 Council and the Government of Sri Lanka to imple-
18 ment the recommendations detailed in the United
19 Nations High Commissioner for Human Right's re-
20 ports that were published on February 25, 2022,
21 and September 6, 2022, and further urges the Gov-
22 ernment of Sri Lanka to facilitate the implementa-
23 tion of HRC/51/1 promoting accountability and rec-
24 onciliation;

1 (8) supports the creation of additional United
2 Nations fact-finding missions into the current state
3 of human rights and corruption in Sri Lanka; and

4 (9) calls on the Sri Lankan Government to rec-
5 ognize the thousands of civilians that were killed,
6 forcibly disappeared, or missing in the final years of
7 the civil war.

○