

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 18, 2021

Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

Congratulations on your confirmation as Secretary of State. We look forward to working with you on a range of issues, including addressing human rights in Sri Lanka, where we are concerned by the government's failure to honor its commitment to truth-seeking and reconciliation in the aftermath of the country's armed conflict that ended in 2009. This conflict was devastating to the Tamil community of Sri Lanka, resulting in over 40,000 Tamil civilian deaths in the final months of the war alone.

We strongly urge the United States to center human rights and democracy in its diplomatic engagement with Sri Lanka and make every effort to promote an international accountability process for Sri Lanka. As you know, the United States played an important role in the drafting and adoption of the resolution cosponsored by Sri Lanka at the UN Human Rights Council in 2015 (Resolution 30/1). With the election of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the present government withdrew from this resolution, speaking not only to the failure of tangible progress but the lack of political will for domestic accountability.

According to the January 27 report from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Rajapaksa government has, over the past year, elevated individuals implicated in war crimes to senior governmental posts; reversed key democratic reforms and consolidated power behind the office of the president; obstructed efforts to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of war crimes; promoted majoritarian and exclusionary rhetoric; engaged in surveillance and harassment of human rights advocates; and, allegedly, employed security forces to abduct and torture dissidents. Reports of ongoing human rights abuses persist, with impunity for past and continuing crimes by state security forces and heavy militarization of Tamil areas.

Upon introducing the January 27 report, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet cautioned that there are "clear warning signs that past patterns of violations could be repeated." In response to the report, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Malawi, Montenegro, and North Macedonia introduced a draft resolution to the Human Rights Council expressing "serious concern" over "deteriorating" human rights in Sri Lanka. The resolution recognizes the lack of accountability for past gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law; seeks to strengthen the capacity of the Office of the High Commissioner to "collect, consolidate, analyse and preserve information and evidence for future accountability for processes for gross violations of human rights;" and requests enhanced monitoring on the situation of human rights in Sri Lanka.

We are grateful that the United States has cosponsored this resolution, and we request that the United States actively seek support from voting members of the Human Rights Council for its passage. We also urge you to commit the United States to making progress towards accountability and institutional reform in Sri Lanka a priority on the international stage.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and we look forward to working with you to prioritize these areas of mutual concern in our foreign policy engagements with Sri Lanka.

Sincerely,



Deborah K. Ross
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Bill Johnson
Member of Congress



Brad Sherman
Member of Congress



David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress



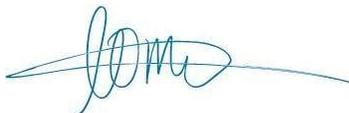
Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress



Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress