



51st regular session of the UN Human Rights Council
**Item 2: Interactive dialogue on the report of OHCHR on promoting reconciliation,
accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka**

Delivered by Nuwan Sanjeewa Bopege
On behalf of Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
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Mr. President,

Sri Lanka is at a critical juncture. As the High Commissioner's report makes clear, the current, *unprecedented* economic crisis is due in part to long standing problems.

Systematic subversion of key accountability processes, the rule of law and independent human rights institutions, *including through the 20th Amendment to the Constitution*, as part of the government's deliberate attempts to avoid accountability for decades-long human rights violations, overall war time atrocities and decades long human rights violations created conditions for corruption, abuse of power and prolonged economic mismanagement that are at the root of the current crisis.

At the same time, disproportionate military spending amid mounting debts left little for essential goods and services including food, energy, health and education.

The government's violent response to popular protests in the wake of the economic crisis leaves no room for any optimism about the prospects of meaningful human rights and democratic reforms and accountability under the administration of President Wickremesinghe.

Many peaceful protestors, including myself, have been arrested since the new president assumed office. These also include Wasanth Mudalige, the convener of IUSF, Galwewa Siridhamma Thero and Hashan Jeewantha arrested under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) *for their alleged involvement in the recent protests*, contradicting the de facto moratorium on the use the PTA announced by the government at the 50th session of this Council. We call on Sri Lanka to repeal the PTA.

Meanwhile families of victims of enforced disappearances have faced routine harassment and intimidation as they continue their over 2000 days long demonstration demanding to know the fate of their loved ones.

In this context, it is imperative that the Council adopts a resolution that enhances scrutiny of the situation and advances accountability for human rights violations, all war time atrocities and economic crimes that are at the root of the current crisis as well as the Easter attacks by strengthening existing measures *to collect and preserve evidence* and adopting new initiatives *such as an expert mechanism on Sri Lanka*.

Thank you.