

**54<sup>th</sup> 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****Oral statement delivered by Swasthika Arulingam****On behalf of Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)****11 September 2023**

Mr. President,

The High Commissioner's report gives a glimpse behind the façade put up to cover the deepening impunity, systematic repression of dissent, continuing violations of in war affected regions and communities, and deepening economic inequality in the country.

Nearly 15 years after the end of the war, victims, survivors, and their families continue to wait for justice. The recent proposal of a Truth and Reconciliation Mechanism, like successive commissions set up by the government over the past 15 years, appears to be designed to shield those implicated in war crimes and crimes against humanity from criminal accountability while keeping the Council and international community distracted. *Without meaningful consultation with victim groups or an environment free from harassment, intimidation and surveillance, this mechanism will only prolong impunity.*

Similarly, failure to credibly investigate the Easter Sunday Bombings including recent revelations about the complicity of state security apparatus leaves little room for public confidence in domestic mechanisms.

Furthermore, the continuing harassment, intimidation, and surveillance of human rights defenders, activists, as well as Tamils, Muslims and families of the disappeared and others in the North and East shows the government's lack of commitment to systemic reforms demanded by protestors. This is demonstrated by the proposal to supposedly reform the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act through equally draconian laws.

In absence of *any possibility of* accountability through domestic mechanisms, the Council remains an important avenue of hope of justice *for the tens of thousands of* victims of past atrocities and of successive governments. Therefore, the Council must strengthen and expand the accountability project as well as the monitoring and reporting mandates on the country.

Thank you