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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 the Association Bharathi Centre Culturel Franco-Tamoul, 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.

[13 February 2017]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Sri Lanka – Arbitrary killing and militarization

Militarization in the North at the rate of 1 personnel per 4-6 civilians is continuing even after the end of civil war in 2009. The police, armed men given with a free hand on attacking, enquiring and victimizing people in the North are never ending sorrow stories. One more recent incident on killing of two Jaffna university students by the police has only added agony, rage in the hearts of millions of Tamils living in the region. The reconciliation efforts, maintenance of peace, order by the authorities have failed time and again with the reengineered good governance administration as well.

Firing incident

Two university students crossing a check point at Kokuvil, Kulaipaddy junction at Jaffna, on the early morning of 20th October were shot by a team of five policemen. The residents rushing to the scene after hearing gun shots were only able to witness the bodies of students being taken away from the spot. The students Pawanraj Sulakshan and Nadarasa Gajan have died on spot succumbing to bullet injuries.

Denial and Recklessness

Despite people's claim on hearing gunshots from the spot, the police claimed that the students met with an accident on driving and were thus injured. Bullets were found on the chest and head of one of the victims later in post mortem that brought out the conspicuous picture of incident. In the need of responsible investigation and answering questions, the Defence Secretary Karunasena Hettiarachchi, added fuel to the fire and defended the murders as standard practice, saying, "Not only in the North, there were similar incidents that were taking place in the South as well. No one need to take this as particular" to the Tamil-majority North of the island. He threatened, "If necessary, the military is ready to assist the police" to ensure law and order.

Only because that the incident happened public and gained momentum in the media, there have been some cursory steps to take action and bring justice to the victims. Else, like those of several other arbitrary killings and white van abductions, this brutal murder claiming lives of these two poor students would have been brushed under the carpet. The incident has unfurled just a day after the Lankan authorities were exhorted by the UN Rights expert to return military-occupied land and reduce the role of the army in northern areas, a long-pending demand of the ethnic Tamils since the end of the nearly three-decade-long separatist war led by the LTTE in 2009 in which thousands of civilians were killed.

Similar Incidents

In May 2015, an advanced level student Vithya Sivalohanathan was brutally murdered by the Police in Northern Province. Peace protests were oppressed and hundred plus people were arrested for demonstration against the crime and perpetrators. The Government, claiming to reconcile has remained a mute spectator in bringing justice.

Tension and Insecurity

Free movement of civilians, Right to live peacefully in their own land has been denied due to heavy militarization in the North. The military men in the North who do not speak the local language, failing to understand the people have often misunderstood and harassed the public at checkpoints and public places. There is extreme fear in the minds of people and movement of civilians are constantly tracked, restricted and oppressed by the armed men.

Notorious Special Task Force

A Special Task Force has been deployed in the region to take measures on claimed drug trafficking, robberies. But on the contrary, the public are suspicious that the military of 1,50,000 present in the region are operating behind growing such activities. Unless the officers in the corridor cooperate, there is no means to escape the heavy Lankan Navy patrols to smuggle drugs across the Pal strait.

Conclusion

Militarization in the Northern region should be stopped, forces should be withdrawn and local autonomous authorities should be put in place to ensure law and order in cooperation with the public. Justice should be brought to the victims of murder, harassment in each of the reported incidents and independent panel of experts should be sent to investigate any such unreported incidents happening in the region.

References

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