



27 March 2014. The UN Human Rights Council today passed a resolution calling on the UN 's human rights office to investigate allegations of war crimes in the civil war in Sri Lanka.

After two hours of debate 23 countries voted for the resolution, 12 voted against with 12 abstentions. The resolution was supported by the United States and the European Union but opposed by Sri Lanka (which is not a member of the 47 nation Council), China, Cuba, Pakistan, Russia and Venezuela. India was among the countries that abstained. The resolution calls for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to deliver a full report in March 2015, and first results in September this year.

Earlier the United Nations human rights chief had called for the establishment of an independent and credible investigation into alleged violations committed in 2009. "This is essential to advance the right to truth for all in Sri Lanka and create further opportunities for justice, accountability and redress," High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay said in her address to the 25th session of the UN Human Rights Council, which wraps up on Friday in Geneva.

The Sri Lankan Government declared victory over the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in May 2009, after a conflict that had raged on and off for nearly three decades and killed thousands of people. The final months of the conflict had generated concerns about alleged violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

“Almost five years since the end of the conflict, it is important for the Human Rights Council to recall the magnitude and gravity of the violations alleged to have been committed at that time by the Government and the LTTE, which left thousands of civilians killed, injured or missing,” said Ms. Pillay.

She noted that in recent years, the Government has established various mechanisms with the task to investigate past violations. “But none have had the independence to be effective or inspire confidence among victims and witnesses,” she stated.

At the same time, new evidence continues to emerge, and witnesses are willing to come forward to testify before international mechanisms in which they have confidence and which can guarantee their protection, the High Commissioner added.

The High Commissioner said she is also “disturbed” by the continued harassment and intimidation targeting human rights defenders in Sri Lanka, even while the Council’s session has been underway, including the detention last week of two prominent non-governmental organization activists undertaking human rights work.

*Photo: Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (right) meets with Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.*

*24 September 2013 UN/Eskinder Debebe.*