

Thank you Bill and all who join us today. I am Anuradha Mittal, Executive Director of the Oakland Institute and the author of the reports we release today. I introduce the report and will then be joined by an eminent panel of experts who I will introduce at the end of my statement.

The goal of our research on Sri Lanka was to understand the social, economic and political reality in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, six years after the conclusion of the civil war.

The result is the first independent in-depth report on post-war Sri Lanka which exposes the following:

- In contrast with reports of peace and stability, six years after the end of the war, the North and the East are still under very heavy military occupation, with one army personnel for every 6 civilians. This has nothing to do with ensuring security from separatist rebels.
- The army is engaged in property development, running luxury tourist resorts, whale-watching excursions, farming, and other business ventures on land seized from local populations. Thousands of Tamil families remain displaced as their homes, schools, places of worship, and livelihoods have been razed to the ground.
- Tamil culture and history are being systematically suppressed through “Sinhalization,” an orchestrated and well-resourced campaign to establish Sinhalese domination in Tamil homelands. This is a continuation of decades long history of marginalization which has involved violence, pogroms, repressive laws, and colonization of the North and the East.
- Thousands of people are missing today. While figures vary from 70,000 missing to twice that number, during the course of our fieldwork, we gathered dozens of testimonies and evidences from family members of the missing and those “whitevanned”. All report that their search for their loved ones had been met with intimidation, threat, and even arrests.

As we release this report, a key question is how does the change of government in January 2015 impact the situation?

President Sirisena has promised a process of truth and reconciliation. Some initial gestures made are, however, minimal given the extent of the problems. More important, our research and analysis raises serious questions about the government’s political will and political space to carry out a thorough investigation and prosecution of war crimes and its ability to ensure remedies that lead to justice.

First, “No Change in Security Status or Removal of Army Camps” is the *déjà vu* position of Sirisena’s government. In February 2015, Minister of Defense Ruwan Wijewardene confirmed the status quo stating that the government would not remove any army formations in the peninsula, nor does it plan to scale down security arrangements.

Second, the recent appointment of Major General Dias as the Army Chief of Staff, despite the fact that under his command the 57th division was implicated in serious human rights abuses, rebuffs current government pledges to ensure justice and reconciliation.

Third, a few political prisoners like Jayakumari Balendran have been released with conditions. But it remains unclear how many political prisoners are still languishing in jails and camps.

Balendran's written testimony to the Oakland Institute is a direct challenge to President Sirisena's commitment.

Lastly, a few lands have been released in the North and the East. For instance, President Sirisena revoked an agreement giving some 800 acres of land in Sampur to the Board of Investment, while a navy camp is to be relocated in Sampur.

In case of Sampur, the new location for the Navy Camp is "literally just across the fence" from its old location. The challenges of resettlement when little to no infrastructure remains, lands are not ready for cultivation, and land titles are not clear given communities fled under heavy shelling without papers, is a huge problem. Also people will be resettled near the proposed Indian-funded Sampur Coal Power Plant, not affected by the release of these lands.

Similar problems remain in the North.

Why we release this report today– to highlight the urgency of the situation

In March 2014, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution to launch an inquiry into war crimes committed by both Sri Lankan state forces and Tamil separatist rebels. The UN was set to release its report in March 2015, which was delayed for 6 months at the request of the new government.

Given the past records of government inaction, international pressure is critical for any decisive action. Instead of pursuing their geostrategic interests, US, India and other countries should demand the release of the UN inquiry. The Human Rights Council should focus on establishing a judicial process under the auspices of the UN to ensure justice is done.

The human rights situation in Sri Lanka will not improve until the culture of impunity is replaced with a culture of responsibility, accountability, and fulfillment of full rights of minorities in the country. Ensuring that this happens is the responsibility—not a political dilemma—of the international community.

In conclusion I quote Rajani Thiranagama, an academic, medical doctor, and a human rights defender gunned down in 1989 for documenting the truth: 'Objectivity, the pursuit of truth and critical, honest positions, is crucial for the community, but is a view that could cost many of us our lives. It is undertaken to revitalize a community sinking into a state of oblivion.'

This report is dedicated to her and her courage to tell the truth.