



Human Rights Council

Consideration of Universal Periodic Review – Sri Lanka

13 June 2008

Statement delivered by Lisa Pusey on behalf of International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAW Asia Pacific)

Thankyou Mr President.

International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAW Asia Pacific) wishes to express its deepest concern that the government of Sri Lanka has rejected recommendations put to it during the interactive dialogue as well as the stark absence of recommendations relating to women's human rights concerns in the review process.

Mr President, the vast majority of the recommendations in the Outcome Document which the Sri Lanka government rejected, relate to the recommendations for Sri Lanka to allow international scrutiny of its human rights situation as well as assistance from UN agencies in addressing the human rights concerns in the country. Given the time constraint we can not list every recommendation, however the recommendations rejected overwhelmingly called on the Sri Lankan government to allow the presence of independent international human rights bodies including the OHCHR and allow unfettered access of Special Procedures¹. Mr President the rejection of these recommendations demonstrates a lack of accountability and transparency to international human rights of the Sri Lankan government. It also conveys an approach contrary to the spirit of this Universal Periodic Review Process. We call on the Sri Lankan government to allow a strong and sustained international human rights presence in the country to monitor, investigate and report on human rights violations and assist in efforts to end human rights violations and impunity.

Mr President, we also wish to express our deep concern that the gravest of human rights violations are taking place with impunity in Sri Lanka including violations of the right to life and disappearances and that in this context the Sri Lankan government rejected **Recommendation 28 (b), 33 (b), and 55 (a) of the Outcome Document** relating to addressing impunity for human rights violations. We call on the Sri Lankan government to accept these recommendations and uphold universally recognised human rights norms and obligations which place a burden on the government to protect, respect and fulfil human rights and ensure perpetrators of human rights violations are brought to justice.

¹ These include recommendations 26 (b), 27 (b), 28 (c) and (d), 32 (d) and (e), 34 (a), 43 (c), 48 (a), 53, 55 (d) and (e), 56 (b), 57 (c), 61 (b), 74 (a) and (b), 75 (a).

In addition Mr President, the Sri Lankan government rejected **recommendation 32 (d) of the Outcome Document** relating to implementation of the recommendations of the Special Representative on Human Rights Defenders to Sri Lanka in relation to restricting the registration and activities of non-governmental organisations and civil society. The rejection of this recommendation follows the same vein as the other rejected recommendations, signally an intention to maintain a lack of accountability and transparency in how the government is responding to the human rights crisis in the country.

We also wish to express our concern that women's specific human rights concerns were not raised during the interactive dialogue resulting in a stark absence of recommendations which reflect the reality of women's human rights situation in Sri Lanka. The only recommendation in the Outcome Document which addresses women's human rights concerns is **Recommendation 35**. While this recommendation is welcomed, we are disappointed that further and stronger recommendations were not raised during the interactive dialogue with Sri Lanka despite the wealth of information submitted by civil society in the compilation of stakeholders reports. We wish to highlight the high level of various forms of violence against women which frequently takes place with impunity including when perpetrated by the armed forces personnel and the police; the critical human rights needs of internally displaced women; the low number of women represented in elected bodies; wage disparities between men and women; inequality under personal laws; the inequality in the state land distribution which awards property in the name of the heads of households thereby discriminating against women; and the failure to address women's reproductive rights. Furthermore we urge the Sri Lankan government to ensure that recommendations contained in the Outcome Document are carried out in a gender-sensitive manner with a view to particular obstacles and barriers which women face as a result of inequality and discrimination, to ensure women enjoy the full benefits of the measures.

Mr President, in conclusion we call on the Sri Lankan government to accept these recommendations in the Outcome Document in compliance with its international human right obligations and ensure the full enjoyment of all women of their human rights.

Thankyou Mr President.