



Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development
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**46th regular of the UN Human Rights Council
Item 2: Interactive Dialogue on the High Commissioner's report on the promotion of
reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka**

**Oral Statement Delivered by Ahmed Adam
On behalf of the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)**

Wednesday, 24 February 2021

Madam President, FORUM-ASIA welcomes the High Commissioner's report and echoes her concerns on the situation in Sri Lanka.

Systematic surveillance and harassment of human rights defenders, civil society, journalists, victims and their families, in particular those who advocate for international accountability for past violations, have escalated in the past year. Continued detention of human rights lawyer Hejaaz Hizbullah without charge since April 2020 reportedly under the Prevention of Terrorism Act is emblematic of the threats against human rights defenders in Sri Lanka. Such threats and fear of reprisals have led to increasing self-censorship and prevented active participation of defenders and victims in this session of the Council.

Forced cremation of COVID-19 deceased contrary to the beliefs of Muslims and other minorities as well as WHO guidelines, and obstruction of memorialisation of victims of the conflict by the Tamil community are some of the recent examples of the growing majoritarian policies that have led to resurgence of violence and discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities.

The 20th Amendment to the Constitution which undermines the independence of the judiciary and democratic institutions such as the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka and removes institutional checks and balances has accelerated Sri Lanka's descent towards authoritarianism.

The government has actively obstructed investigations into past violations and demonstrated it has no intention of pursuing accountability. The Council should not be misled by the appointment of a yet another Commission of Inquiry just ahead of this session of the Council. Any hope of justice for thousands of victims and survivors as well as prevention of further deterioration in Sri Lanka depends on the Council's principled action based on the High Commissioner's recommendations. Thank you.