

SRI LANKA: Will it be too late for the arrival of international assistance to monitor gross violations of human rights?

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A Statement by the Asian Human Rights Commission

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The AHRC notes with shock the further intensification of violence in Sri Lanka with the assassination of a Member of Parliament, Nadarajah Raviraj, belonging to the TNA and the killings of the civilians at Vakaraï in the Batticaloa district.

These deaths are just part of a continuous situation of assassinations done by all parties to the conflict, which are the state, LTTE and other militant groups. The area of political discourse has shifted towards nothing other than direct assassinations. The parties to the conflict claim justification for the deaths they cause and there is no regret in any quarter about what is taking place.

The death of the legislator took place in Colombo, the capital which has received international attention in recent months for a series of abductions and disappearances that happen despite of the many heavily guarded check points within the city. The crisis of the capital is just one more indication of the crisis within the country that is facing a situation that seems to have gone out of control.

As the rule of law machinery has been in a state of collapse now for a long time it is no surprise that things have gone out of control. With the two leading parties in political agreement at the moment there should have been a strategy developed to deal with the basic rule of law situation, without which the degeneration into a situation that produces more and more tragic events cannot be brought under control. However, it does not appear from reports that a strategy to strike a balance and to keep law and order intact is taking place in any way.

Meanwhile an international debate on assistance to restore basic order within the country has been stalled due to disagreements with the government and others who are interested in the situation from outside the country, such as the Co-Chairs, as well as many others. The discussion about monitoring by an international body has been trivialized with all sorts of suggestions about local monitoring. If there was such a possibility of local monitoring the situation of continuous killings could not have happened. The international community seems to be confused about the situation and has been unable to come out with any practical scheme to investigate these violations through any credible investigating unit. The state has not been able to offer anything more than just fact finding inquiries. Such fact finding inquiries, by their very nature are unable to stop the continuing violence.

UN agencies have repeatedly called for the international monitoring of the human rights situation in Sri Lanka. Human rights organisations in Sri Lanka and many outside the country have also supported this call. It is quite obvious that without such an opening from the outside through such human rights monitoring this situation will not only continue but degenerate further. Will Sri Lanka be added to the list of countries in which the international community and the United Nations intervenes to help if only rather belatedly?