

MEDIA RELEASE – 20 September 2011

**Sri Lanka should be suspended from the Councils of the Commonwealth, says roundtable**

A round table held at Federal Parliament today resolved to call for a suspension of Sri Lanka from the Councils of the Commonwealth pending an international independent investigation into war crimes (see backgrounder below). This is the first time that groups in Australia have publicly made this call.

Greens Senator for NSW Lee Rhiannon said: “Sri Lanka will continue to be the elephant in the room in Commonwealth forums until allegations of war crimes and discrimination are independently investigated and addressed.

“Last week Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper set the bar for Commonwealth leaders to follow in questioning whether Sri Lanka should continue to host the 2013 CHOGM meeting unless it can prove it has made progress on investigating alleged war crimes.

“With CHOGM shortly to be held in Perth the Australian government needs to add its voice and ensure that all Commonwealth nations uphold principles of human rights and the rule of law”, said Senator Rhiannon.

The Hon John Dowd said: “It would be a disgrace to the whole Commonwealth if CHOGM were to be held in Sri Lanka prior to Sri Lanka dealing with the war crimes committed there.

“There will be no justice for the people of Sri Lanka or solution to the problems unless the crimes committed on both sides are dealt with.

“The Commonwealth must suspend Sri Lanka from its membership. Failure to do so will mean all members condone the recent history of Sri Lanka” said Mr Dowd.

Dr Sam Pari, spokesperson for the Australian Tamil Congress said: “The Sri Lankan regime needs to know that perpetrators of war crimes cannot simply continue to evade accountability with impunity, and deny justice to their victims.

“A tribunal for the Tamil killing field should be turned into a global symbol of deterrence for other authoritarian regimes willing to kill their own civilians. Without a tribunal, the Tamil killing field becomes a horrific precedent suggesting that in our era, states can escape unscathed for egregious violations of human rights law.

“Suspending Sri Lanka will send a strong unambiguous message to Sri Lanka: as long as you continue to obstruct an international independent inquiry into war crimes you will face consequences”, said Dr Pari.

## **The roundtable resolved the following:**

We call on the Australian Government and the Federal Opposition to:

1. Support calls for Sri Lanka to be suspended from the Councils of the Commonwealth until the government of Sri Lanka agrees to an international independent investigation into war crimes, restoration of human rights and the rule of law and the implementation of all of the recommendations of the UN Expert Panel Report on War Crimes in Sri Lanka. Failing that event occurring within a reasonable time that steps be instituted to suspend Sri Lanka from the Commonwealth.
2. Oppose Sri Lanka hosting CHOGM in 2013.

We call on the Prime Minister Julia Gillard to follow the lead of Canadian President Stephen Harper in saying he will not attend CHOGM in Sri Lanka in 2013 if there is no progress in Sri Lanka's human rights and the establishment of an independent investigation into war crimes.

The round table, hosted by Greens Senator Lee Rhiannon, looked at furthering the call for an independent war crimes tribunal for Sri Lanka. Participants were: the Hon John Dowd AO QC (President of the International Commission of Jurists Australia); Dr Sam Pari (Australian Tamil Congress); Associate Professor Jake Lynch (Director of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, Sydney University); Dr Ben Saul (Professor of International Law and Director of the Sydney Centre for International Law at Sydney University); Peter Arndt (Executive Officer of the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission Brisbane); Greens Senator Lee Rhiannon.

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