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Human Rights Groups Condemn Proposed Appointment of Alleged War Criminal Silva to U.N. Peacekeeping Group

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WASHINGTON, D.C., JAN. 27, 2012—Sri Lankan and international news outlets have reported that Shavendra Silva—a former military general in the Sri Lankan army who stands accused of war crimes and torture—has been selected for a position in U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s Special Advisory Group on Peacekeeping Operations.

This appointment is outrageous on many levels, according to a coalition of human rights groups including SPEAK Human Rights and Environmental Initiative, the UNROW Human Rights Impact Litigation Clinic at American University Washington College of Law, the Center for Justice and Accountability and the Center for Constitutional Rights. Silva played a central role in the Sri Lankan Army’s brutal military campaign against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, which caused up to 40,000 civilian deaths and incalculable suffering, and violated fundamental principles of international humanitarian and human rights law. While the Sri Lankan government has proclaimed its success in carrying out a “humanitarian operation” during the armed conflict, a U.N. Panel of Experts appointed by Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon concluded that there are credible allegations that the Sri Lankan Army committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Panel of Experts report, submitted to the Secretary General on April 12, 2011, discusses the responsibility of the battalion that Silva commanded – the 58th Division of the Sri Lankan Army – in these allegations.

Silva’s appointment is also inappropriate in light of Sri Lanka’s record in U.N. peacekeeping operations. In 2007, Sri Lankan peacekeeping troops were deported from Haiti for allegedly committing crimes of sexual violence against Haitians, including underage girls.

An individual considered for the Special Advisory Group on Peacekeeping Operations should be capable of demonstrating leadership on peace, unblemished by the allegations made against Silva. If confirmed, Silva’s appointment to the Special Advisory Group would send an appalling message to the world: accused war criminals are legitimate authorities on peace. Therefore, it is imperative that the world call on Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to reject or rescind any proposal to appoint Silva to the Special Advisory Group on Peacekeeping Operations in the interest of human rights, justice, and accountability.

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