

IDD Academic interviewed for Sky News on David Cameron's Sri Lanka trip

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On Saturday 16 November [Dr Danielle Beswick](http://staff/profiles/government-society/beswick-danielle.aspx), IDD Lecturer and Director of Research, was interviewed live on Sky News about UK Prime Minister David Cameron's trip to Sri Lanka for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). From 2010-12 Danielle undertook British Academy funded research into the politics of identity in post conflict Sri Lanka, delivering a briefing on this for a donor roundtable at the British High Commission in 2011.

The interview centred on Cameron's decision to attend the meeting after the leaders of Canada, India and Mauritius withdrew. The UK Prime Minister has been strongly criticised by human rights groups for his decision to attend the CHOGM. In 2009 Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse presided over a military victory by the country's armed forces over a Tamil separatist group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The UN estimates that up to 40,000 Tamil civilians were killed in the closing stages of the war and allegations of war crimes have been made against both the LTTE and Government forces. Since the end of the war the Government has invested in development and security, including through large infrastructure deals with China and maintaining large peace-time armed forces. However, former LTTE-held, mainly Tamil, areas have become militarised. There are allegations of ongoing harassment of Tamils by security forces and Sri Lanka's political system is seen by many to have become more centralised, authoritarian and exclusionary.



Responding to questions from the presenter, Danielle argued that having controversially committed to attend the summit Cameron had then made the best of that decision. By visiting the former LTTE-held North of the country, the UK Prime Minister highlighted the continuing lack of impartial investigation of the crimes committed at the end of the war. His visit to Tamil newspaper offices which had been attacked and the restrictions faced by some reporters covering the CHOGM, including the team from Channel 4 News, also highlighted the significant barriers to press freedom in Sri Lanka. In sum, the decision to attend may have afforded the Rajapakse government some legitimacy, as critics suggest, but Cameron did not attempt to hide the challenges for justice and accountability in post war Sri Lanka as some had feared. The key questions now are whether it will make a difference going forward, especially whether, and how, the Sri Lankan government will respond to this renewed pressure.