

Sri Lanka Country Profile

Demographics

Geographical location:

Sri Lanka is an island country in the northern Indian Ocean off the southeast coast of the Indian subcontinent in South Asia. It has maritime borders with India to the northwest and with the Maldives in the southwest. Its geographical location and harbours made it of great strategic importance for trade, from the time of the ancient Silk Road through to the Second World War.

Population: 22.24 million (July 2016 estimate)

- Nationality Sri Lankan
- Ethnic groups: (2012 estimate)

Sinhalese – 75%

Sri Lankan Tamil – 11.2%

Sri Lankan Moors – 9.2%

Indian Tamil – 4.2%

Other – 0.5%

Languages:

- Sinhala (official and national language) – 74% (majority Buddhist)
- Tamil (official and national language) – 18% (majority Hindu)
- Other – 8%
- English – spoken competently by around 10% of the population, is commonly used in government and is referred to as the 'link language' in the constitution

Religious demographics: (2012 estimate)

- Buddhism – 70.2%
 - Hinduism – 12.6%
 - Islam – 9.7%
 - Roman Catholic – 6.1%
 - Other Christians – 1.3%
 - Other – 0.05%
-
- The north of the country is predominately Hindu
 - Christians are concentrated in the west
 - Muslims are concentrated in the east
-
- Most members of the majority Sinhalese community are Theravada Buddhist.
 - The majority of Tamils, the largest ethnic minority, are Hindu
 - Most Muslims are Sunni, although there is a small Shia minority which includes members of the Bohra community
 - Most Muslims are Sunni, although there is a small Shia minority which includes members of the Bohra community. The Muslim community is comprised of both ethnic Sinhalese and ethnic Tamils.

Indian Tamils – Small communities of Malays and Burghers, and small numbers of Veddahs (descended from the earliest inhabitants) <http://thecommonwealth.org/our-member-countries/sri-lanka/so>Age:

- 0-14 years – 24.4%

- 15-24 – 14.7%
- 25-54 – 41.7%
- 55-64 – 9.9%
- 65 and over – 9.35%

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ce.html>

Currency:

The currency of Sri Lanka is the Sri Lankan Rupee (LKR).

LTTE

The LTTE has been designated as a terrorist organisation by many United Nations member States including the 25 countries of the European Union, India, the United States, and Canada and was considered to be one of the most ruthless terrorist organisations in the world. - <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G08/132/02/PDF/G0813202.pdf?OpenElement>

Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Committee

Set up in May 2010 following the end of the Civil War in 2009, the commission was mandated to investigate the facts and circumstances which led to the failure of the ceasefire agreement of 2002. It also included enquiring into lessons that should be learnt from the events, and the institutional and legislative measures which needed to be taken in order to prevent any form of recurrence.

The commission concluded that the Sri Lankan military did not deliberately target civilians, but that the LTTE repeatedly violated international humanitarian law. The Commission stated that the military gave the “highest priority” to protecting civilians whereas the LTTE had had “no respect for human life”.

Background

The first Sinhalese arrived in Sri Lanka late in the 6th century B.C., probably from northern India. Buddhism was introduced circa 250 B.C., and a great civilization developed at the cities of Anuradhapura (kingdom from circa 200 B.C. to circa A.D. 1000) and Polonnaruwa (from about 1070 to 1200). In the 14th century, a south Indian dynasty established a Tamil kingdom in northern Sri Lanka. The Portuguese controlled the coastal areas of the island in the 16th century and the Dutch in the 17th century. The island was ceded to the British in 1796, became a crown colony in 1802, and was formally united under British rule by 1815. As Ceylon, it became independent in 1948; its name was changed to Sri Lanka in 1972. Tensions between the Sinhalese majority and Tamil separatists erupted into war in 1983. After two decades of fighting, the government and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) formalized a cease-fire in February 2002 with Norway brokering peace negotiations. Violence between the LTTE and government forces intensified in 2006, but the government regained control of the Eastern Province in 2007 and by May 2009, the remnants of the LTTE had been defeated. Since the end of the conflict, the government has enacted an ambitious program of economic development projects, many of which are financed by loans from the Government of China. In addition to efforts at reconstructing its economy, the government has resettled more than 95% of those civilians displaced during the final phase of the conflict and released the vast majority of former LTTE combatants captured by Government Security Forces. At the same time, there has been little progress on more contentious and politically difficult issues such as reaching a political settlement with Tamil elected representatives and holding accountable

those alleged to have been involved in human rights violations and other abuses during the conflict.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ce.html>

Religious Affairs

According to the 2008 Gallup poll, Sri Lanka is the third most religious country in the world with 99% of Sri Lankans saying religion is an important part of their daily life.

Sri Lankan constitution;

Chapter 2 Article 9 - The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana, while assuring to all religions the rights granted by Articles 10 and 14(1)(e).

Chapter 3 Article 10 - Every person is entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.

Chapter 3 Article 13 (1) (a) – the freedom of speech and expression including publication

Chapter 3 Article 14 (1) (e) - the freedom, either by himself or in association with others, and either in public or in private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching

Chapter 3 Article 15 (2) - The exercise and operation of the fundamental right declared and recognized by Article 14(1)(a) shall be subject to such restrictions as may be prescribed by law in the interests of racial and religious harmony or in relation to parliamentary privilege, contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence

Matters relating to family law (including divorce, child custody, and inheritance) are adjudicated according to the customary law of the ethnic or religious group of the individual.

Religion is a mandatory subject in the public school curriculum, and parents are able to elect for their children to study Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism or Christianity. However, there are not enough teachers in all of their faiths, particularly in the more rural regions.

Registration

The largest restriction placed on religious institutions in Sri Lanka is the issue of registration. Religious groups are not required to register with the government, nor is there any such requirement to register places of worship. Incorporation is not available in practise for Christian churches, and they are compelled to seek other forms of registration to establish a legal status e.g. establishing a trust, society, NGO, or company.

Government ministries are able to order circulars, which although do not have the force of law are still directives, and are often used to restrict the freedom of religion or belief. A 2008 circular stated that future construction of any place of worship was to be subject to prior permission of the ministry. A revised circular of 2011 stated that the “continuation of a place of worship of any

activity headed by a religious leader, in the guise of religion is deemed illegal unless approved by the Ministry". Although the second circular was revoked in 2012, police continue to cite it in attempts to close places of worship.

In 2014, NGOs accused the authorities of reluctance to investigate and prosecute over attacks on places of worship, including mosques, Hindu kovils and churches. They argued that at times local police and government officials appeared to be working with Buddhist national organisations, as prosecutions of perpetrators were rare.

Evangelical Churches in the south of the country reported being told by local governmental bodies to suspend worship activities as they were 'unauthorised gatherings', or close down if they were not registered with the government, despite no legal requirement to do so. The National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL) stated that "dozens" of churches from all parts of the country had been questioned about their legality based on the circulars.

Conversion

BBS General Secretary Ven. Galagoda-Atte Gnanasara Thero made claims of "Islamic invasion and aggression", as well as 'forced conversions' by Christian groups, which pose threats to Buddhism within the country.

On 24th April 2014, President Rajapaksa established a religious police unit for religious complaints. The unit reports to the Ministry of Law and Order, although it is housed in the Buddhist Division of the Ministry of Buddhist Sasana and Religious Affairs. This announcement in 2014 was the first time President Rajapaksa acknowledged an increase in religiously motivated violence, which he condemned. However many came out against the unit, including religious groups and political opponents. They argued it would strengthen the hand of violent Buddhist groups (such as BBS), whilst also encouraging religious sectarianism and reinforcing police state measures and entrenching the culture of impunity. Furthermore, some religious minority groups argued that due to the structuring of the unit, they were afraid to report incidents of conflict or violence for fear of retaliation

Political Affairs

Conventional long form: Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

Governmental type: Presidential Republic styled on the French version. (Prior to the 1972 Constitution it was based on the Westminster version).

Capital: Colombo

Legislative capital: Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte (suburb of Colombo, the largest city)

Independence: 4th February 1948

National elections:

Sri Lanka elects at a national level both the legislative and the President, both of which have 5 year terms, since the 19th Amendment of the Constitution (passed in 2015).

Legislature:

The legislature of Sri Lanka unicameral and consists of 225 members. 196 are elected from 22 multi-seat constituencies through PR electoral system; the remaining 29 are elected from National Lists allocated to the parties in proportion to their share of the national vote. Parties must clear a threshold of 1/8 of votes to win seats in the respective constituency. Each voter may cast three preference votes.

Executive branch:

Chief of State and Head of Government – President Maithripala Sirisena (since 9th January 2015)

Prime Minister – Ranil Wickremesighe (since 9th January 2015)

Cabinet – appointed by the President in consultation with the Prime Minister

Elections and appointments – the President is directly elected by majority popular vote for a 6-year term, with a maximum of 2 terms.

The President is elected via a contingent voting system, whereby the electorate rank up to three candidates in order of preference. If no candidate wins a majority in the first round of counting, ballots whose first preference candidate has been eliminated are redistributed to their second preference. The winner is the candidate with the most votes after the second round of counting.

Most recent parliamentary election (2015):

Held in August 2015, 10 months ahead of schedule, to elect Sri Lanka's 15th Parliament.

The incumbent coalition, United National Front for Good Governance (UNFGG), led by the United National Party (UNP) won 106 seats, an increase of 46 from the 2010 election. However they failed to secure a majority in Parliament (the required number of 113). The main opposition, the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) won 95 seats, a decline of 49 since 2010.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe (UNP) was able to form a national government with the support of UPFA MPs loyal to President Maithripala Sirisena.

Parties:

Political parties solely based on religious identity are relatively new in Sri Lanka. Three major political parties can be exclusively categorized as political parties that employ Sinhala-Buddhist concerns and demands for electoral gains: Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) and Jathika Nidahas Peramuna (JNP) (Imtiyaz 2010). Presently, both Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) and Sinhala Ravaya (SR) are viewed as main ethno-religious forces who are trying to disturb the peace and tranquillity of the country. These groups share common goals: to uphold Buddhism and establish a link between the state and religion; to advocate a violent solution to the Tamil question and; to oppose all form of devolution to the minorities. The agendas of the JHU, JNP, BBS and SR are the biggest hurdle for the government of Sri Lanka to seek meaningful political initiatives to reform the state. -

<http://www.seu.ac.lk/researchandpublications/symposium%20fia/2014/islamic%20thoughts%20Civi/Religious%20Symbolism%20and%20Politics%20in%20Sri%20Lanka.pdf>

Parliamentary alliances

Tamil National Alliance (TNA)

- Formed in 2001
- The alliance originally supported self-determination in an autonomous Tamil state
- It supported negotiations with the LTTE to resolve the Sri Lankan civil war
- The Alliance has dropped its request for self-determination, and has instead stated it supports regional self-rule of the Tamils instead
- It originally consisted of 4 parties: Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front, Illankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi, People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam, and Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation
- The TNA currently has 16 members in the national parliament
- It controls the provincial government in the Northern province

- It is part of the provincial government in the Eastern province
- The leader of the alliance is R. Sampanthan, who is also leader of the opposition (even though the Alliance came third in the 2015 national parliamentary election)
- Ideology: Tamil nationalism, Federalism

United National Front for Good Governance/ United National Front

- Founded 2005
- Members: All Ceylon Muslim Congress, Democratic National Movement, Democratic Party, Jathika Hela Urumaya, Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, Tamil Progressive Alliance, United Left Front, United National Party (largest party in the Alliance)
- The Alliance contested the 2015 Sri Lankan election under the symbol and name of the United National Party
- It was elected as the Alliance to form the government after the 2015 election
- It holds 106/225 seats in the parliament of Sri Lanka
- Its leader, and therefore Prime Minister, is Ranil Wickremesinghe (also leader of the United National Party, the largest party within the Alliance)
- Ideology: Centre-right
-

United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA)

- Founded 2004
- Leader: President Maithripala Sirisena (his predecessor being President Rajapakse)
- Current members of the Alliance: Sri Lanka Freedom Party (largest party), Sri Lanka Mahajana Pakshaya, Ceylon Workers' Congress, Communist Party of Sri Lanka, Desha Vimukthi Janatha Pakshaya, Democratic Left Front, Eelam People's Democratic Party, Eelavar Democratic Front, Mahakana Eksath Peramuna, National Freedom Front, Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal, Sri-TELO
- Political position: Centre-left to left
- Ideology: Democratic socialism

2015 Presidential election

Former President Mahinda Rajapaksa of the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) was first elected to power in 2005. After ending the conflict with the LTTE in 2009, he sought re-election to office, with his second term commencing in January 2010.

In September 2010, then President Rajapaksa passed the 18th Amendment which removed the two-term limit on the office of the Presidency.

On 20th November 2014, then President Rajapaksa signed a Gazette notification expressing his desire to seek a third term. Two candidates were considered as serious contenders; the incumbent President, and Mr Maithripala Sirisena representing the New Democratic Front (Alliance).

Sirisena had defected from the government, previously holding the office under President Rajapaksa as Secretary for Health.

The New Democratic Front was led by the United National Party, the opposition party at the time. Sirisena was the alliance's 'common candidate' for the Presidential election.

The incumbent President Rajapaksa lost the election 47.6% to Sirisena's 51.3%, with a turnout of

82%.

Soon after the election, Rajapaksa handed over leadership of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party to President Sirisena, as per the SLFP constitution which states that any SLFP member who is President is automatically leader of the party. Soon afterwards, the party split into two factions – those supporting President Sirisena and who were willing to work with the minority UNP government, and the Rajapakse faction (which acted as the main de facto opposition to the new government). Nimal Siripala de Silva was appointed as parliamentary leader of the SLFP and the official Leader of the Opposition.

2015 General Election

The UPFA led by the SLFP won only 95 seats, while its rival the UNFGG Alliance led by the UNP won 106 seats. The UNP invited the SLFP to form a majority government. 45 MPs joined the new government; however 50 MPs remained in the Opposition with the Sri Lanka Freedom Party facing an inevitable split.

In August 2016, President Sirisena launched a purge against the Rajapaksa loyalists by removing them as electoral organisers. He took a strong stand against them, stating "Those who destroyed the country, those who destroyed democracy, those who terrorised the people through their 'white van' culture, those who robbed billions and crowned themselves as champions of waste and corruption will not be allowed to take back power in this country".

As well as the Official Opposition, an opposition alliance known as the 'Joint Opposition' was formed in 2015 after the Presidential and General Elections. It is formed of the left, pro-Rajapaksa faction of the SLFP, alongside the larger left-wing parties of Sri Lanka. It is currently the largest opposition group in parliament, despite R. Sampanthan of the Tamil National Alliance holding the position as Leader of the Opposition.

There are currently 13 female members of the national parliament.

International Affairs (including membership of int. organisations, UPR/treaty committees coming up etc) treaty compliances

Sri Lanka has not submitted an ICJ jurisdiction declaration and is a non-party state to the ICt

Membership of international organisations

- World Trade Organisation
- World Health Organisation
- World Confederation of Labour
- International Labour Organisation
- United Nations

UN Treaties

- Convention against Torture (1994)
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1980)
- Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (2016)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1981)
- International Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1982)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1980)

- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1996)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991)
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (2000)
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children child prostitution and child pornography (2006)
- Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016)

Sri Lanka has only been a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council once, from 1960-61 (then called Ceylon)

The next UPR is to be published November 2017

Economy and Trade

(2015 statistics)

Sri Lanka is the 81st largest export economy in the world. In 2015, they exported \$11.8bn and imported \$21bn, resulting in a negative trade balance of \$9.2bn.

The top exports of Sri Lanka are tea (\$1.22bn) and clothing. Its top imports include planes, helicopters, refined petroleum, cars and crude oil.

The top export destinations of Sri Lanka are the US (\$2.99bn), the UK (\$1.1bn), India (\$830m), Germany (\$584m) and Italy (\$420m). The top import origins are India (\$5.49bn), China (\$3.55bn), Japan (\$1.39bn), France (\$1bn), and the UAE (\$986m).

<http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/lka/>

FORB (including legislation)

Sri Lankan constitution;

Chapter III Article 10 states "Every person is entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice", however Chapter II Article 9 also states "The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana".

Although legislation gives Buddhism a "foremost place", it is not recognised as the state religion.

The rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and the right to freedom from torture are recognized as absolute and non-derogable rights. - <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G08/132/02/PDF/G0813202.pdf?OpenElement>

Registration

The largest restriction placed on religious institutions in Sri Lanka is the issue of registration. Religious groups are not required to register with the government, nor is there any such requirement to register places of worship. Incorporation is not available in practise for Christian

churches, and they are compelled to seek other forms of registration to establish a legal status e.g. establishing a trust, society, NGO, or company.

Government ministries are able to order circulars, which although do not have the force of law are still directives, and are often used to restrict the freedom of religion or belief. A 2008 circular stated that future construction of any place of worship was to be subject to prior permission of the ministry. A revised circular of 2011 stated that the “continuation of a place of worship of any activity headed by a religious leader, in the guise of religion is deemed illegal unless approved by the Ministry”. Although the second circular was revoked in 2012, police continue to cite it in attempts to close places of worship.

In 2014, NGOs accused the authorities of reluctance to investigate and prosecute over attacks on places of worship, including mosques, Hindu kovils and churches. They argued that at times local police and government officials appeared to be working with Buddhist national organisations, as prosecutions of perpetrators were rare.

Evangelical Churches in the south of the country reported being told by local governmental bodies to suspend worship activities as they were ‘unauthorised gatherings’, or close down if they were not registered with the government, despite no legal requirement to do so. The National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL) stated that “dozens” of churches from all parts of the country had been questioned about their legality based on the circulars.

There have been claims that Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), a Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist organisation, are continuing to promote the supremacy of the country’s ethnic Sinhalese Buddhist population, whilst also creating hostilities towards the religious and ethnic minorities. At the BBS convention in September 2014, leaders called for a new constitution which protected the majority Sinhalese community.

Conversion

BBS General Secretary Ven. Galagoda Atte Gnanasara Thero made claims of “Islamic invasion and aggression”, as well as “forced conversions” by Christian groups, which pose threats to Buddhism within the country.

On 12th January 2014, a Buddhist mob attacked two evangelical churches in the southern town of Hikkaduwa.

On 24th April 2014, President Rajapaksa established a religious police unit for religious complaints. The unit reports to the Ministry of Law and Order, although it is housed in the Buddhist Division of the Ministry of Buddhist Sasana and Religious Affairs. This announcement in 2014 was the first time President Rajapaksa acknowledged an increase in religiously motivated violence, which he condemned. However many came out against the unit, including religious groups and political opponents. They argued it would strengthen the hand of violent Buddhist groups (such as BBS), whilst also encouraging religious sectarianism and reinforcing police state measures and entrenching the culture of impunity. Furthermore, some religious minority groups argued that due to the structuring of the unit, they were afraid to report incidents of conflict or violence for fear of retaliation.

Human Rights (including legislation)

National institutional framework

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka was established 1996 with the broad task of promoting and protecting human rights in Sri Lanka. It has 10 regional offices which delegates its functions at the district level.

The Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights (MDM and HR) was established in 2006, which coordinates with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other international human right bodi

Quasi courts

Outdated legislation regarding the position of women within the minority Muslim community is being challenged. The Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act (MMDA) allows girls as young as 14 to be married off, without their consent. However, efforts to reform MMDA are being met with resistance from religious groups attempting to prevent reform. The Muslim Personal Law Reform Committee was established in July 2009 with the aim of reforming the MMDA. Headed by former Supreme Court judge Saleem Marsoof, its recommendations are long overdue, with the final report having been delayed. Committee member, and president of the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ukama (ACJU), the leading religious body of Islamic theologians, Rizwe Mufthi stated that the MMDA was “perfection in the present state” and was met with criticism from activists for reform. Aside from allowing child marriages, the MMDA also allowed a male guardian to force his daughter or niece into marriage, even if she objects.

The Quasi court system of Sri Lanka, which upholds Sharia Law, only permits men to sit as judges, whereas the same form of Quasi courts in other Muslim countries (e.g. Malaysia) allow women judges. Activists emphasise that it is the state’s responsibility to ensure there is no discrimination of women under the law, regardless of whether it is on religious grounds, as the Quasi court system is funded by the state, and equality under the law is established within the Sri Lankan constitution.

During divorce proceedings, it is common that a Muslim man is never questioned as to his reasons for requesting a divorce, however a Muslim women’s request must be accompanied with witness statements and evidence detailing why she requires such divorce.

Two lawyers released an independent report at the end of 2016, documenting the consequences of MMDA. The report, “Unequal Citizens: Muslim Women’s Struggle for Justice and Equality in Sri Lanka” recounted how a 15-year-old girl was forced into a marriage with a man who had been harassing her, and tried to molest her after forcibly entering her home. The report also detailed the experiences of the Quasi court system. In one instance, a girl who had been married off at 14 applied for divorce on the grounds of sexual abuse by her husband, a judge interrogated her for more than two hours and included questions surrounding the specific detail of the sexual violence. The result of which was the girl suffering from further psychological trauma and a suicide attempt.

UN involvement

In October 2015, the Sri Lanka, along with the US, co-sponsored UN Resolution A/HRC/30/L.29, entitled ‘promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka’. However, in contradiction to the adopted resolution which called for international involvement including international judges to investigate the atrocities that took place during the civil war from 1983-2009, Sri Lanka insisted on creating a domestic-only mechanism.

Prevention of Terrorism Act

First enacted as a temporary law in 1979 under the Jayewardene presidency, the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) was then made permanent in 1982. It provides the police with broad powers to search, arrest, and detain suspects. Under the PTA, an individual can be detained for periods of up to 18 months if the Minister has reason to believe or suspect that they are connected with or concerned in any unlawful activity. ‘Unlawful activity’ is widely defined, and includes pasting a poster on a wall, and is punishable with death. The law also provides immunity for governmental officials responsible for abuses if they were deemed to be acting good

faith or fulfilling an order under the act.

The PTA was used widely during the civil war, primarily against those suspected of involvement with the LTTE. Exact numbers of persons still held under the PTA are unknown, but estimates range from 120 to 162 detainees. Since April 2016, the government has arrested at least 11 people under the PTA for alleged terrorist activities.

In 2010, Sri Lanka lost its Generalised Scheme of Preferences + (GSP+) status with the EU, which allows developing countries to pay less or no duties on their exports to the EU. This gives them vital access to the EU markets and contributes to their economic growth. In 2010, the EU insisted that a Sri Lanka's return to GSP+ status would be dependent on amending the PTA to make it compatible with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

In September 2015, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) produced a scathing report against the PTA. Following the report, in October 2015 the Sri Lankan government, along with the US, co-sponsored UN resolution A/HRC/30/L29, entitled 'promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka'. Paragraph 12 of the resolution committed the government to review and repeal the PTA, and enact a new law in line with international best practice.

On 18th May 2016, arrests made under the PTA in Chavakachcheri in the Northern Province prompted Sri Lanka's National Human Rights Commission to issue Directives on Arrest and Detention under the PTA. The directives intend to protect detainees against the security forces' broad powers given to them under the PTA, particularly at the time of arrest and later detention. These include guarantees of medical and legal assistance, registration of arrest, right to language of detainee's choice, security from torture and ill-treatment, and special protection for women and children. The Commission's mandate includes being promptly informed of all PTA arrests, to access any person arrested or detained under the PTA, and to access any place of detention at any time.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/06/13/sri-lanka-enforce-commission-directives-terror-detainees>

In October 2016, draft framework of the Counter Terrorism Act (CTA), the legislation intended to replace the PTA, was leaked to the press. The result was an onslaught of criticism, as activists argued the proposed CTA draft would fail to resolve the issues of the PTA, including arbitrary arrests and up to 18 months detention with legal oversight. Furthermore, critics also argued the proposed CTA would significantly widen the scope of the repressive powers available to the Sri Lankan state.

7th April 2017 – under pressure from the European Council, who is currently evaluating Sri Lanka's GSP+ application, the Sri Lankan government have produced another draft of the CTA. The latest version omits "espionage" from the list of offences, which had been included in previous versions. The draft explains that matters relating to espionage would be suitably dealt with in a (not yet enacted) National Intelligence Act. The amended CTA retains a provision to punish "any person who intentionally and unlawfully distributes or otherwise makes available a message to the public with the intent to incite the commission of a terrorist offence". Access to council remains ambivalent, and all police powers have been retained. The term 'terrorism' which was previously not defined, has now been defined as the definition of 'terrorism' contained in the Draft Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism.

Enforced disappearances

Since the late 1980s, there have been an estimated 60,000 – 100,000 alleged disappearances, with most Sri Lankans knowing someone who has lost a family member. In June 2016, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, a former president of Sri Lanka and head of the government's Office on National Unity and Reconciliation acknowledged to having received over 65,000 complaints of disappearances since 1995. In 1989 and 1990, Sinhalese young people who were suspected of being affiliated with the leftist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) were killed or forcibly disappeared by the government-operated death squad. As well as this, Tamils suspected of involvement or links to the LTTE also disappeared at the hands of government operatives during the 26 year civil war. Furthermore, the LTTE took prisoners and abducted adults and children to serve as fighters, many of which are still missing today.

The PTA has contributed to the prevalence of enforced disappearances as it allows for extended administrative detention, as well as incommunicado and secret detention. According to Amnesty International, there is credible evidence to prove that in some cases enforced disappearances have been widespread and systematic, and thus if proven in a court of law, may amount to crimes against humanity.

Following resolution 30/1, there has been some positive development with regards to enforced disappearances. In May 2016, the Sri Lankan parliament ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. As well as this, a bill to implement the Convention by criminalising enforced disappearances in the Sri Lankan penal code was tabled in parliament for 9th February 2017; however it is yet to be debated. Furthermore, the Sri Lankan Office on Missing Persons was established in August 2016, but it has been criticised for failing to consult with victims and civil society, and public confidence in the office has declined.

UK Relationship – Aid, Parliamentary Mentions, APPG etc.

DfID

Only 1 active project which has been ongoing since 28th January 2014 and is due for completion on 31st October 2017.

Global Mine Action Programme – Removal of land mines and explosives remnants from the war.

“Long after a conflict finishes, landmines and ERW continue to devastate people’s lives. Around the world today, millions of people live alongside land littered by landmines, grenades, rockets and ammunition. This is a major threat to the physical safety of communities. In 2011, it was estimated that more than 4,000 people were killed or injured by landmines and ERW. The threat that landmines and ERW pose to development is even more far-reaching. Millions of people are prevented from using agricultural land and accessing essential services, such as health and education, because of landmine and ERW contamination. Their presence hampers freedom of movement, prevents the safe and voluntary return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees and obstructs the delivery of humanitarian aid. The goal of our mine action work is to build peace and security and support development in countries affected by landmines and ERW.”

Project budget – £29,999,991
Spend to date (03/04/17) - £20,337,336

Benefitting countries – Cambodia, Laos, Mozambique, Sri Lanka, Vietnam

Project budget approved for 2017/18 - £0
Project budget 2015/16 - £423,552

APPG on Sri Lanka

Chair & Registered Contact	Mr Ranil Jayawardena	Conservative
Vice Chair	Andrew Rosindell	Conservative
Vice Chair	Ian Paisley	Democratic Unionist Party
Vice Chair	Ann Clwyd	Labour
Vice Chair	Lord Dholakia	Liberal Democrat
President	Lord Naseby	Conservative

Lord Naseby – visited Sri Lanka in January 2017 and met with the High Commissioner

APPG for Tamils

“To promote in Parliament peace with justice and dignity for Tamils in the Island of Sri Lanka and advance their development so as to recognise their legitimate socio-political aspirations.”

			Notes
Chair & Registered Contact	James Berry	Conservative	
Senior Vice Chair	Siobhain McDonagh	Labour	Chairs APPG for Ahmadiyya Muslims
Vice Chair	Richard Harrington	Conservative	EB knows
Vice Chair	Joan Ryan	Labour	
Vice Chair	Wes Streeting	Labour	
Secretary	Tom Brake	Liberal Democrat	
Treasurer	Jim Dowd	Labour	

Commonwealth Relationship

Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) joined the Commonwealth in 1948.

2012 –

2013 – Sri Lanka held the 23rd CHOGM in Colombo. Prior to Summit, there were calls for the hosting country to be changed due to the government’s lack of progress regarding human rights. The Prime Ministers of Canada, Mauritius and India boycotted the meeting of heads of government. David Cameron, at CHOGM 2013, promised that if Sri Lanka did not do enough to investigate allegations of human rights violations committed by Sri Lankan forces, then he would push for a UN inquiry.

Contacts – Key Political/NGO/Academic/Media

Sri Lankan High Commissioner to the United Kingdom – Her Excellency Amari Wijewardene

British High Commissioner to Sri Lanka and the Maldives – His Excellency James Dauris

Global Tamil Forum

London-based Tamil diaspora organisation - <http://www.globaltamilforum.org/>