

AUSTRALIAN TAMIL CONGRESS'S PRESS RELEASE

The Australian Tamil Congress (ATC) while welcoming Australia's response to Sri Lanka's LLRC report, released by Foreign Minister Rudd, reiterates the need for an international independent war crimes inquiry.

While we welcome Mr Rudd's assertion that the report failed to comprehensively address war crimes allegations, we are concerned that Mr Rudd has continued to call on Sri Lanka to investigate itself.

The Tamil community has no confidence in the Government of Sri Lanka to conduct an independent investigation and deliver justice to the victims of the war. We cannot expect justice when an investigation is initiated by a party to the alleged crimes.

The LLRC's failure to acknowledge and address issues of war crimes has revealed Sri Lanka will not genuinely pursue justice for war victims. Furthermore, history has proven that internal inquiries by Sri Lankan authorities have predominantly failed. With a well entrenched culture of immunity still persisting, a truly independent investigation is only possible through an international mechanism as recommended by the UN panel of experts last year.

The upcoming UN Human Rights Council session offers an ideal opportunity to take up this issue and we call upon the Australian government to lend its support to initiate such a process.

In the mean time, honest implementation of LLRC recommendations that deal with demilitarisation, resettlements of the displaced and promoting media freedom could provide some much-needed relief in the immediate term.

However, without clear and firm timeframes for implementation and also without some international oversight, these recommendations will face the same fate as the recommendations previously made by several such commissions in Sri Lanka. We call upon Australia help to establish such an oversight mechanism during the upcoming UNHRC session through Australia's permanent UN representative in Geneva.

We also thank the Australian government and the people of Australia for the generous support with demining and reconstruction activities in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka, which seriously lag behind the rest of the country in human resource development.

With refugees from Sri Lanka continuing to reach our shores, we reiterate that ensuring peace and accountability in Sri Lanka will benefit Australia too.