

Joint Statement: Sri Lanka should not host CHOGM

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10 Nov 2013 | [Lee Rhiannon](#)
[Human Rights](#)

Australian Greens Senator Rhiannon and New Zealand Green MP Jan Logie will be holding a Press Conference today in Sri Lanka.

Time: 10.30am (local time)

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MEDIA STATEMENT

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A delegation of Australian and New Zealand MPs at the conclusion of their fact finding visit to Sri Lanka have found that the ongoing abuses of human and legal rights are so serious that the Commonwealth meeting scheduled for Colombo should not proceed and that the Sri Lanka government should not be given the chair of CHOGM for the next two years .

Senator Lee Rhiannon from Australia and Jan Logie MP from New Zealand have been on a fact finding visit to Sri Lanka. Both MPs will report to their respective parliaments on their findings next week.

Joint statement from Senator Lee Rhiannon and MP Jan Logie:

“If CHOGM goes ahead and if Sri Lanka is given the Chair of this organisation the Commonwealth will have failed the people of Sri Lanka and damaged its own high standing with the international community.

“Elected officials and members of civil society in Sri Lanka have provided us with examples of massive illegal land confiscation by the armed forces; people being gaoled and detained with regular disregard for legal rights; violence, often involving rape, of women and children with no police investigation of these crimes; and ongoing intimidation of media workers.

“We visited areas where the army is occupying people's land. The homes of the displaced people are now tin shacks serviced by dirt pot holed roads. Many people have been living like this for more than two decades.

“Large numbers of women regularly suffer sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the Sri Lankan armed forces. One lawyer described to us the evidence collected about these crimes. In one case they have text messages from Major General Mahinda Hathurusingha to the 'comfort women' he frequently abuses.

"The level of hardship for women and their dependents is shocking. More than 40,000 households in the north and east of the country are now female headed and few of them receive any government assistance if they cannot find work.

"Politicians described to us incidents in the past week where young party workers have been intimidated and detained. One worker we met who had just been released from gaol after ten months was never charged.

"The harassment of media workers and media owners continues. In Jaffna we saw the bullet holes in the printing presses, the computers and walls of one media outlet. Journalists and paper distributors have been attacked.

"Clearly this is an unsafe country for journalists to work as those who commit these crimes have not been investigated or charged. We were left with the impression that the government is becoming increasingly repressive towards those committed to a critical independent examination of events in Sri Lanka.

"If CHOGM events proceed in Sri Lanka the Commonwealths heads need to ensure that their handshakes, talks and communiques with President Rajapaksa are not used by this regime to claim legitimacy for their current operations.

"CHOGM's presence in Sri Lanka risks becoming an award for a regime accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity. This international body should not allow itself to become a propaganda tool for the Rajapaksa regime.

"The Commonwealth played a key role in challenging apartheid in South Africa and oppression in Fiji. CHOGM should continue to stand by its own values and principles by working for improved human rights protection and justice in Sri Lanka.

"The Australian Greens and Green party of New Zealand will continue to work for an independent investigation into war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by all sides in the conflicts in Sri Lanka, and for CHOGM to stand with all the people of Sri Lanka not with a regime accused of war crimes.

"We look forward to reporting fully to the Australian and New Zealand parliament when we return.

Sydney Morning Herald

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