

UN Human Rights Chief announces details of Sri Lanka conflict investigation

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GENEVA (25 June 2014) – UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay announced Wednesday that three distinguished experts have agreed to advise and support the team set up to conduct a comprehensive investigation of alleged human rights violations in Sri Lanka, as mandated by the Human Rights Council in March. The investigation will look into alleged serious violations and abuses of human rights and related crimes by both parties in Sri Lanka during the last years of the armed conflict.

The experts are:

Mr Martti Ahtisaari, former President of Finland and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, who has also served as a UN diplomat and mediator and is renowned for his international peace work;

Ms Silvia Cartwright, former Governor-General and High Court judge of New Zealand, and judge of the Extraordinary Chambers of the Courts in Cambodia, as well as former member of the UN Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women;

Ms Asma Jahangir, former President of Pakistan’s Supreme Court Bar Association and of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, previous holder of several Human Rights Council mandates and member of a recent fact-finding body into Israeli settlements.

“I am proud that three such distinguished experts have agreed to assist this important and challenging investigation,” the High Commissioner said. “Each of them brings not only great experience and expertise, but the highest standards of integrity, independence, impartiality and objectivity to this task.”

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The experts will play a supportive and advisory role, providing advice and guidance as well as independent verification throughout the investigation.

The Investigation Team with whom they will work will consist of 12 staff, including investigators, forensics experts, a gender specialist, a legal analyst and various other staff with specialized skills. It will be operational for a period of 10 months (up to mid-April 2015).

“Once again, I encourage the Government and people of Sri Lanka to cooperate fully with this investigation which can help shed light on the truth, and advance accountability and reconciliation in Sri Lanka,” the High Commissioner said, adding that the investigation would still go ahead undeterred if such cooperation was not forthcoming.

In March 2014, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted resolution 25/1 entitled ‘Promoting Reconciliation, Accountability and Human Rights in Sri Lanka’ which requested the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to undertake a comprehensive investigation into alleged serious violations and abuses of human rights and related crimes by both parties in Sri Lanka during the period covered by Sri Lanka’s Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) which examined the last years of the armed conflict.

The Council requested the UN Human Rights Office “to establish the facts and circumstances of such alleged violations, and of the crimes perpetrated, with a view to avoiding impunity and ensuring accountability,” with assistance from relevant experts and special procedures mandate holders.

The resolution requests the Office to present an oral update to the Human Rights Council at its twenty-seventh session in September 2014, and a comprehensive report at its twenty-eighth session in March 2015.

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