

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 23, 2015

The Honorable John Kerry  
Secretary of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

As the 30<sup>th</sup> regular session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) has begun, we urge continued U.S. leadership in promoting accountability and reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

As you know, Sri Lanka continues to recover from a decades-long civil war between the Government of Sri Lanka and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) forces, which killed tens of thousands of Sri Lankans. Both sides face allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

In the years since the end of the war, the United States has been a powerful voice in pressing for reconciliation and accountability. In March 2014, the United States' strong leadership in the UNHRC resulted in the adoption of Resolution 25/1, which requested the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) conduct a comprehensive investigation into human rights violations committed during Sri Lanka's civil war. The OHCHR released its report and final recommendations on September 16, and the UNHRC will address them during its current session. As the United States concludes its tenure on the UNHRC, we ask our American diplomats at the UN to advocate for the implementation of the recommendations made in the report as well as actions that promote true accountability and reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

Under former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, the Government of Sri Lanka failed to fully implement the recommendations of the 2010 Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission, the domestic mechanism established to address reconciliation. This Commission did not adequately investigate past abuses or hold perpetrators accountable for human rights violations.

We firmly believe that the international community has a critical role to play in supporting Sri Lanka's efforts toward reconciliation and accountability, and the findings of the OHCHR report will help determine the path forward. We support a robust international role through the participation of international judges and prosecutors that will lend credibility to Sri Lanka's accountability process. The international community must also work with the Sri Lankan government to implement vigorous witness protection systems to ensure the success of any accountability process.

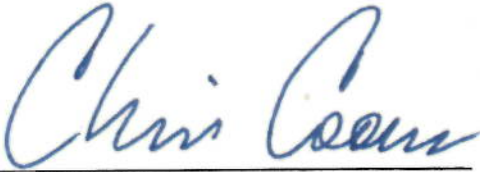
The presidential election in Sri Lanka earlier this year set the stage for a new era of democratic reform. Departing from decades of authoritarian policies implemented under former President Rajapaksa, the election of President Maithripala Sirisena offers an

opportunity for Sri Lanka to strengthen its institutions of democratic governance by eliminating corruption, expanding media freedom, and demilitarizing the North and East provinces. We commend President Sirisena and Sri Lanka's parliament for the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment and the return of one thousand acres of private land to families in the North. We also recognize the recent August parliamentary elections as a reflection of the will of the Sri Lankan people to move toward a path of democratic reform and post-war reconciliation. However, President Sirisena still has much work to do to fully meet his commitments to establish a credible mechanism for accountability.

We strongly agree with what you said in May: In Sri Lanka "true and lasting peace, especially after a civil conflict, requires policies that foster reconciliation, not resentment. It demands that all citizens of the nation be treated with equal respect and equal rights, and that no one be made to feel excluded or subjugated. It calls for a military that projects its power outward to protect its people, not inward to police them."

Sri Lanka is indeed at a critical moment in history. We urge the State Department to remain actively engaged on current UNHRC efforts regarding Sri Lanka, and to demonstrate U.S. diplomatic leadership beyond the UN to promote true peace, accountability, and reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

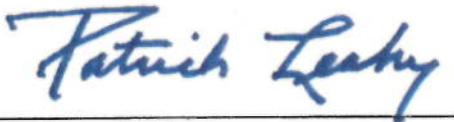
Sincerely,



Senator Christopher A. Coons



Senator Robert P. Casey, Jr.



Senator Patrick Leahy



Senator Kirsten Gillibrand



Senator Sherrod Brown