

**Debate Pack**

CDP-0194 (2022)

By John Curtis (subject specialist), Nigel Walker (compiler)

8 November 2022

---

# UK response to the human rights and economic situation in Sri Lanka

<b>1</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>FCDO Human Rights and Democracy report</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Press and media articles</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Press releases</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>PQs</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Further Parliamentary material</b>	<b>32</b>

# 1 Summary

A Backbench Business Committee debate on the UK response to the human rights and economic situation in Sri Lanka is scheduled for Wednesday 9 November 2022 in the House of Commons chamber.

## 2 Background

### 2.1 Overview of the crisis and economic problems

#### Mass protests begin in February 2022

Protests began building in February 2022 in Sri Lanka, in response to the country's worst economic crisis since it became independent nearly 75 years ago. The protests, [according to the International Crisis Group](#) (ICG) “morphed into a nationwide uprising”.

Protestors were calling for the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, [who came to power in November 2019](#), and the removal of the Rajapaksa family from politics. Gotabaya's brother, Mahinda Rajapaksa (who was President 2005-15), served as his Prime Minister, and [other family members have held key Government posts](#).

By July 2022, both the Prime Minister and President had resigned.

This is a remarkable turn-around in their political fortunes. As well as victory in the 2019 Presidential elections, Gotabaya Rajapaksa's Sri Lanka People's Front party had [won a two-thirds super-majority in legislative elections in August 2020](#).

The turning point in the protests appeared to come on 31 March [when large crowds gathered near the President's residence](#), and the police attempted to disperse the crowds with tear gas and water cannons, leaving near 50 people injured, and 45 people were later arrested. [NGOs claimed that the police](#) had used “excessive and unprovoked force” against protestors, and that several of those arrested were beaten in custody.

#### Roots of the economic crisis

The Covid-19 pandemic was a huge blow to Sri Lanka's economy, and in particular its tourist industry, which was already suffering from the aftermath of the [2019 Easter bombings](#). Tourism before the pandemic was [providing around five % of Sri Lanka's Gross Domestic Product](#) (GDP), and the industry is an important provider of foreign exchange, particularly US dollars, that Sri

Lanka requires to finance its imports of essential goods, [on which it is heavily reliant](#), and to pay its huge foreign debts.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa's economic policies have [also been blamed for making the economic crisis worse](#). When he first came to power in 2019, [his Government implemented significant tax cuts](#), for example cutting the value added tax to 8% from 15%. In April 2021 the [Government also decided to ban the import of fertilizers](#). Although they later reversed the ban after protests, this was too late to stop a dramatic fall in crop yields, worsening the already serious shortages of food.

The [ICG also blamed](#) "Gotabaya's authoritarian, centralised and non-transparent decision-making", describing his administration as "surrounded by cronies and oblivious to criticism", and that it rejected repeated calls for a course correction as the crisis deepened.

All these economic challenges are making Sri Lanka's debt problems worse. The [country owes more than \\$51bn \(£39bn\) to foreign lenders](#). At the end of the civil war in 2009, then President Mahinda Rajapaksa, took out a significant amount of foreign loans to help pay for the war and to finance a huge infrastructure drive. When a new Government came into power in 2015, it was [already warning that these debts were not sustainable and it looked to restructure some of them](#).

## 2.2

## Resignations/sackings begin

### Prime Minister replaced, 9 May 2022

On 9 May Mahinda Rajapaksa resigned as Prime Minister. The [BBC said his departure was "no surprise"](#), as there had been days of speculation he would go - after reports his brother had told him he needed to quit. However, [Mahinda Rajapaksa had held on](#) "with the view that as the more popular of the brothers, he shouldn't be the one to go".

A national curfew was announced on the day of his resignation, as violent protests continued. It was [reported that 151 people had been admitted to hospital following protests that day](#). Five people were also reported to have been killed, including an MP from the ruling party [who was said to have fired shots at protestors after being surrounded by a mob](#), and was then killed himself.

On 12 May Ranil Wickremesinghe, a veteran politician from the opposition United National Party, [was appointed as the new Prime Minister](#). He has served five previous stints in the role.

The main opposition SJB party, or Samagi Jana Balawegaya, declined to join a unity government led by Wickremesinghe, but said it would "[unconditionally](#)

[support the positive efforts to revive the economy](#)". Previously the party had said it would not support a new Government unless the President stood down.

The second-largest opposition party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), said it would join the cabinet.

## Sri Lanka defaults on its debts, 20 May 2022

On 20 May Sri Lanka failed to pay \$78m (£63m) in debt interest payments, [causing two of the world's biggest credit rating agencies to declare it had defaulted](#).

This came after the [expiration of 30-day grace period](#) to come up with the payment.

The Government had already started talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) over a bailout to help it renegotiate its debt agreements with creditors.

## New Prime Minister announces plans to slash expenditure

Reuters reported on 24 May that the new Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe would present an interim budget within six weeks, "[slashing infrastructure projects to re-route funds into a two-year relief programme](#)".

On 25 May it was announced that the Prime Minister will [also take on the role of Finance Minister](#).

Wickremesinghe began negotiations with the IMF saying [he hoped to secure a "sustainable loan package"](#) from the organisation, while also committing to undertake structural reforms to draw new investments into the country.

He also expressed concerns over food shortages from August onwards, saying he was looking to foreign aid from allies and multilateral agencies to ensure supplies of staple foods such as rice.

## 2.3

## Protests continue, Gotabaya Rajapaksa resigns

### Protests and economic shocks continue

On 1 June, the Financial Times reported that the government [was applying for aid from a food bank operated by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation](#) to secure supplies of rice and other staples to help combat shortages of basic foodstuffs.

The paper also reported that fuel shortages were resulting in the closure of power stations leading to long blackouts, that hospitals were postponing treatments due to lack of medicine and [aid groups were warning of a “worsening hunger crisis owing to double-digit inflation”](#).

On 6 July, hundreds of protesters gathered near the parliament building in Colombo to launch what they called [the “final push” to remove the government](#).

On the same day President Rajapaksa [announced he had spoken to his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin](#), requesting credit in order to import fuel, calling the conversation “very productive”.

## Gotabaya Rajapaksa’s resignation

On 9 July mass protests in the capital escalated, and the demonstrators [broke in President Rajapaksa’s residence “signalling that the government had effectively lost control of the city”](#). The President had reportedly been evacuated from his residence the day before.

Later that day the Speaker of the Parliament, Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena, announced on television that Rajapaksa agreed to step down on 13 July. The Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe also said he would resign [“in response to pressure from party leaders”](#), and that an all-party government would be formed.

On 11 July [Wickremesinghe confirmed his plans to resign](#), along with the rest of his government, but once a new all-party cabinet was in place.

## Gotabaya Rajapaksa flees country, state of emergency declared

On 13 July, the Sri Lankan air force announced that President [Rajapaksa had fled the country on one of their planes alongside his wife](#), travelling to the Maldives.

The Parliamentary Speaker announced that Rajapaksa had [named the Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe as acting President in his place](#). Though there were some questions as to when the transfer of power took place, as Rajapaksa did not formally resign until two days later.

The [Financial Times reported](#) that “Rajapaksa’s delay in tendering his resignation was probably intended to help him retain diplomatic immunity while he sought refuge in a country that would take him in”. And that he was likely to be cautious about where to travel to as he could “face prosecution relating to his role in the final, bloody phase of Sri Lanka’s war against Tamil separatists in 2009, when he was defence secretary”.

On the day Rajapaksa fled Wickremesinghe [declared a national state of emergency and a curfew in Western Province](#), that included the capital Colombo where the protests were centred. He commented that “[We can’t tear up our constitution. We can’t allow fascists to take over](#)”, and that he “ordered the military to do whatever was necessary to restore public order”.

On 15 July, announcing that he had now received Rajapaksa’s resignation, the Parliamentary Speaker said that Wickremesinghe would remain as acting President until a new head of state was elected.

## Parliament elects Wickremesinghe as President

On 20 July, Sri Lanka’s Parliament [voted to make acting President Ranil Wickremesinghe the country’s new permanent leader](#). Wickremesinghe won 134 votes, compared to 82 votes for Dullas Alahapperuma, from the Sri Lanka People’s Front party of Mahinda Rajapaksa, (the Parliament has 225 seats).

In a speech after the vote Wickremesinghe [called for opposition parties to work with him saying “I am ready to have a dialogue with you”](#).

The new President was already “unpopular” [according to the Financial Times](#), writing that he is “reviled by the protesters, who accuse him of lacking legitimacy and say he protected Rajapaksa from allegations of corruption in a previous stint as prime minister between 2015 and 2019”. The newspaper also reported that earlier in the month “protesters ransacked Wickremesinghe’s office and burnt down his private residence”.

## 2.4

## Wickremesinghe Presidency

The BBC reported in September that the protests have largely ended due to the action of the Government, including arrests, since Wickremesinghe took over the Presidency, and that [“dozens have been detained by police in recent weeks, with most since released on bail”](#).

Three student activists detained by police, were reported to have been held under an anti-terrorism law, [drawing criticism from human rights organisations](#).

On 2 September former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa returned to Sri Lanka. A defence ministry spokesman told BBC News that [Mr Rajapaksa “would be given security as a former president”](#).

Sri Lanka’s economic crisis continues. Its [annual inflation rate increased to more than 70% in August, and food prices rose by nearly 85% compared to a year ago](#).

The country agreed a [preliminary deal with the IMF in September](#) for a loan of about \$2.9 billion. The Government is still in talks with the international lender, however, on the details of the package and the reforms it will be required to undertake to access the finance. The Sri Lankan negotiating team [described talks held at the beginning of November as “productive”](#).

### 3

## FCDO Human Rights and Democracy report

[Human Rights and Democracy: 2020 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office report](#) (PDF)

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

8 July 2021

[Extract]

### Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

The overall human rights situation in Sri Lanka continued to deteriorate in 2020. The Government delivered free and peaceful parliamentary elections despite the COVID-19 pandemic, and maintained low numbers of COVID-19 cases compared to global figures. However, there was increased surveillance and intimidation of civil society, constraints placed on communities practising religious burial rites, a number of lengthy detentions without charge, and several setbacks on post-conflict accountability and reconciliation.

At the UN Human Rights Council in February, the Sri Lankan Government withdrew its support for resolutions 30/1, 34/1, and 40/1 on post-conflict transitional justice, accountability and reconciliation. Although it announced its commitment to a domestic mechanism for reconciliation and accountability, there was no progress on this. The UK made clear its commitment to reconciliation and accountability in statements delivered on behalf of the Core Group on Sri Lanka at the HRC in February, June and September.

Sri Lanka's commitment to accountability was further called into question in March when President Rajapaksa pardoned and released former Army Staff Sergeant Sunil Ratnayake, who was convicted in 2015 for the murder of eight civilians (including children) in Jaffna in 2000. The President continued to appoint controversial military figures accused of war crimes to government roles, while civilian functions such as the Secretariat for Non-Governmental Organizations were brought under the control of the Ministry of Defence.

In October, the Government passed the 20th Amendment to the Constitution, which extended executive power over appointments to the judiciary and independent institutions, and reversed several important institutional checks and balances.

In March, the President dissolved parliament ahead of elections, which were then twice postponed because of the COVID-19 outbreak. Although the Government went on to deliver peaceful and democratic elections in August,



the delay resulted in a lack of parliamentary oversight between March and August. The Government instead formed several presidential ‘taskforces’ without parliamentary scrutiny, including to oversee the COVID-19 response.

In March, the Government also announced a policy of mandating cremations for all COVID-19 deaths, despite World Health Organization guidelines that permitted burials. This particularly affected Muslim and some Christian communities, for whom burial is an essential rite. In December, the Supreme Court dismissed several petitions that challenged this policy. The outbreak of COVID-19 also led to an increase in anti-Muslim sentiment, fuelled by hate speech and disinformation suggesting that Muslims were ‘carriers’ of COVID-19 and were violating prevention measures. In June, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, expressed concern over the clampdown on freedom of expression, noting an announcement made by the police in April to arrest those critical of the Government’s COVID-19 response.

Through the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) programme and during the COVID-19 pandemic, the UK supported victims of sexual and gender-based violence who were particularly affected by lockdowns and stay-at-home measures. The UK also helped build media capacity to highlight the impact of COVID-19 on marginalised communities. In October, media reports alleged that judicial medical officers and police had conducted invasive intimate examinations on LGBT+ persons without their consent, following which the Justice Minister Ali Sabry gave instructions to halt and investigate the practice.

Throughout the year, the Government continued to use the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), despite a renewed pledge at the 43rd session of the HRC to review the legislation. In April, prominent human rights lawyer Hejaaz Hizbullah was arrested by Sri Lanka’s Criminal Investigation Department under the PTA. Hejaaz was detained without charge or presentation before a court. International rights groups noted an increase in intimidation, surveillance and online abuse, including threats to lawyers, journalists, families of disappeared persons and individuals working on human rights and anti-corruption.

In November, unrest at Mahara prison over COVID-19 concerns resulted in the death of eleven inmates and injury of over 150. A committee appointed to investigate the unrest concluded that the inmates’ demands had been reasonable, and autopsies revealed that all inmates had died of gunshot wounds. In November, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka wrote to the Inspector General of Police to highlight an increase in deaths in custody, and released a prison study which noted that the treatment of prisoners fell below international standards.

In 2021, the UK will continue to press for progress on human rights, gender equality and protections for minorities and vulnerable groups. We shall continue to invest in ambitious programmes which support conflict-affected communities, promote the role of civil society, facilitate social cohesion, and underline the critical importance of post-conflict reconciliation and accountability.

## 4

## Press and media articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.

### [Protests in Sri Lanka over economic crisis and police brutality](#)

Al Jazeera  
Nils Adler  
27 October 2022

### [Exposing Western double standards through weaponizing human rights](#)

Daily News (Sri Lanka)  
15 October 2022

### [U.N. extends Sri Lanka wartime violations monitoring, China opposes](#)

Reuters  
Emma Farge and Uditha Jayasinghe  
7 October 2022

### [UN resolution flags Sri Lanka rights abuses, economic crisis](#)

Al Jazeera  
7 October 2022

### [Sri Lanka rejects resolution at the UNHRC](#)

Daily News (Sri Lanka)  
7 October 2022

### [U.N. presses Sri Lanka to advance human rights amid economic crisis](#)

Reuters  
Uditha Jayasinghe  
12 September 2022

### [Sri Lanka: New Government urged to make progress on accountability, institutional reforms](#)

UN News  
6 September 2022

### [Sri Lanka must 'reverse the drift towards militarisation': UN](#)

Al Jazeera  
6 September 2022

[\*\*Sri Lanka will stand it's ground at UNHRC – Minister Sabry\*\*](#)

Daily News (Sri Lanka)

6 September 2022

[\*\*Sri Lanka economic crisis requires 'immediate global attention': Rights experts\*\*](#)

UN News

20 July 2022

[\*\*Sri Lanka crisis: How do you fix a broken country?\*\*](#)

CNN

Heather Chen

16 July 2022

[\*\*Five things to know about Sri Lanka's crisis\*\*](#)

United States Institute for Peace

Tamanna Salikuddin

15 July 2022

[\*\*Sri Lanka: PM orders military to do 'whatever it takes' to maintain order\*\*](#)

The Guardian

Hannah Ellis-Petersen

14 July 2022

[\*\*Exploited in a crisis: why are Sri Lankans getting on boats bound for Australia?\*\*](#)

The Guardian

Devana Senanayake, Aliyar Mohammed Geeth and Ben Doherty

25 June 2022

[\*\*Sri Lanka's PM resigns after weeks of protests over economic crisis\*\*](#)

The Guardian

Hannah Ellis-Petersen

9 May 2022

[\*\*Sri Lanka: Rights under attack during economic crisis\*\*](#)

Amnesty International

6 May 2022

[\*\*Sri Lanka: The divisions behind the country's united protests\*\*](#)

BBC News Online

Nick Marsh

4 May 2022

## 5

# Press releases

### [UN Human Rights Council 51: Resolution Introduction for Sri Lanka](#)

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

6 October 2022

Ambassador Simon Manley introduced a resolution on Sri Lanka at the UN Human Rights Council:

Thank you Mr President

I have the honour to introduce draft resolution L1 Rev 1 entitled ‘Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka’ which has been proposed by a group of states comprising Canada, Germany, Malawi, Montenegro, North Macedonia, the United States and the United Kingdom.

The text is largely based on last year’s resolution but has been updated to reflect some of the key developments over the last 18 months in what has been a rather dramatic time for Sri Lanka - an economic crisis, mass protests, and a change in government, all of which have had a significant bearing on the human rights situation in the country.

The draft both recognises the challenges which Sri Lanka has faced during this period and acknowledges progress where this has occurred.

It reflects some of the more recent concerns outlined in the High Commissioner’s report, especially the human rights impact of the economic crisis.

And it also addresses several longstanding issues which still need to be addressed. These include the lack of accountability for past violations, the many unresolved cases of enforced disappearances, the need for Sri Lanka to meet its own commitments on the devolution of political authority, as well as the need to uphold the rights of all people in Sri Lanka including Tamils and Muslims.

The main requests in the resolution are in Operative Paragraphs (OP) 8 and 18.

OP8 seeks to continue the work initiated in last year’s resolution which created capacity within the Office of the High Commissioner to collect, consolidate, analyse and preserve information to support judicial and other proceedings.

This capacity was set up in response to the lack of progress made by Sri Lanka’s domestic legal mechanisms towards accountability for past alleged

gross violations of human rights. Unfortunately, this capacity has only been fully operational since May of this year and so requires more time to complete its mandate. We are therefore seeking to extend it for a further period as recommended by the former High Commissioner.

OP18 requests further reporting by OHCHR and proposes to move from an 18-month time frame to 2 years. This is in recognition of the severe challenges which Sri Lanka is currently facing – allowing Sri Lanka sufficient time and space to make progress on human rights in what we all recognise is a very difficult context.

Mr President – the UK is a close partner to and long-standing friend of Sri Lanka, our times run deep. We bring this resolution in order to help Sri Lanka address ongoing challenges and in order to encourage progress on reconciliation, justice and human rights.

I commend this draft resolution to my fellow members of this Council.

### **Sri Lanka rejects resolution at the UN Human Rights Council**

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Sri Lanka)**

**6 October 2022**

Sri Lanka categorically rejected resolution A/HRC/51/L.1 (Rev.1) titled “Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka” tabled by the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Malawi, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and the United States, which was adopted by a vote at the Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva, today (06 October 2022).

Minister of Foreign Affairs Ali Sabry delivered the statement on behalf of Sri Lanka as the country concerned and called on the Members of the Council to reject the resolution by voting against it.

In support of Sri Lanka’s position opposing the resolution, the delegation of Pakistan called for a vote. Over half of the members of the Council did not support the resolution with 07 countries (Bolivia, China, Cuba, Eritrea, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Venezuela) voting against the resolution and 20 countries abstaining on the vote. 20 countries voted in favour of the resolution.

Representatives of Pakistan, Brazil, China, Venezuela, Japan and Republic of Korea made statements in support of Sri Lanka prior to the vote.

Pakistan said that they share the concerns of Sri Lanka and other Member States that the resolution is intrusive and this level of scrutiny would not be even acceptable to any sovereign state including the Core Group. They further observed that the resolution fails to recognize the horrendous acts of

terrorism committed by the LTTE and its sponsors, lacks balance, proportionality and consistency. At a critical time when the people of Sri Lanka expect demonstrations of global solidarity and support to face its economic challenges which are not entirely of Sri Lanka's own making, the Core Group chose a path that has the potential to exacerbate the problem instead of improving the situation.

Brazil noted the need to avoid politicization of the work of the Council and reiterated their position that cooperation of the country concerned is key to the success of this Council's initiatives. Brazil highlighted the responsibility of the international community to support the country in its recovery including through international cooperation and assistance.

China appreciated the Government of Sri Lanka's commitment to promoting and protecting human rights, advancing sustainable socio-economic development, improving living standards, protecting the rights of the vulnerable groups, facilitating national reconciliation and combatting terrorism. China regretted that the resolution is tabled without the consent of country concerned, is a product of politicization, and will by no means play any positive role in the promotion of human rights in Sri Lanka. China highlighted that the work of Council should be guided by its founding principles and that all parties should promote genuine dialogue and cooperation and refrain from adopting double standards. China rejected the practice of using human rights as a pretext to interfere in the internal affairs and undermine the sovereignty of other countries to the detriment of international cooperation.

Venezuela expressed their deep concern at initiatives that do not have the support of the country concerned and that the Core Group is insisting on imposing hostile initiative, monitoring and oversight mechanism without the consent of Sri Lanka, ignoring the progress made by the Government. Venezuela highlighted that the mechanism financially bleed out over 6 million dollars that could have been better used to support the least developed countries and further that the practice of wasting money seems all too common in the Council.

Japan recognized the progress made by Sri Lanka and said that the Government's own initiatives, efforts and commitments are indispensable to achieving real change on the ground.

Republic of Korea noted with appreciation the efforts of the Government of Sri Lanka to promote national reconciliation, reconstruction and prosperity.

Sri Lanka is grateful to the countries which withstood pressure by the sponsors and demonstrated their support to Sri Lanka by voting against or abstaining on the vote as well as by speaking in support of Sri Lanka.

While delivering the Sri Lanka statement as the country concerned, the Foreign Minister regretted that a draft resolution on Sri Lanka is tabled once again despite the progress made domestically on reconciliation and human rights and Sri Lanka's continued constructive engagement with the Council. He outlined Sri Lanka's intention to move forward domestically with replacing the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) with a comprehensive national security legislation, and the introduction of Constitutional amendments and a legal framework to strengthen democratic governance, participation and the rule of law as well as independent institutional oversight. On reconciliation and human rights, Sri Lanka is awaiting the final report of the Presidential Commission and the establishment of a domestic truth-seeking mechanism is under advanced discussion. He also referred to Sri Lanka's upcoming engagement with the UPR process.

Minister Sabry highlighted that while the resolution may meet the objective of advancing the political considerations of the sponsors, it is manifestly unhelpful to Sri Lanka.

The Minister strongly opposed the resolution, particularly the proposal in Operative Paragraph (OP) 8 that seeks to 'extend and reinforce' the so-called "external evidence gathering mechanism" created by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The mechanism is outside the mandate envisaged for the Council. No sovereign state can accept the superimposition of an external mechanism that runs contrary to its Constitution and which pre-judges the commitment of its domestic legal processes.

The Minister also noted that many countries have already raised serious concerns on the budgetary implications of this resolution given its ever-expanding mandate. He further noted that this is an unhelpful and misdirected drain on the resources of all Member States, including the donors in the midst of ongoing global crises. In sharp contrast, he said that we are faced with the dire financial needs of developing countries to prevent hunger and child malnutrition.

Foreign Minister Sabry objected to the references in the resolution to matters which are outside the framework of the Council such as domestic economic and financial policy. He further observed that solutions to economic and financial crises faced today by many countries will not be found in the mandate, the instruments or the expertise of the Council.

The result of the vote demonstrates that the resolution is another example of the North-South polarization and politicization of the Council, contrary to its founding principles. This vote also demonstrated solidarity among the countries of the South which continued to support the basic founding principles of the Human Rights Council of universality, impartiality, objectivity



and non-selectivity leading to constructive international dialogue and cooperation.

The Human Rights Council is comprised of 47 Members, including 13 African states, 13 Asia- Pacific states, 8 Latin American & Caribbean States, 7 Western Europe and Other States, and 6 Eastern European States.

### [UK provides lifesaving aid for the most vulnerable in Sri Lanka](#)

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

23 September 2022

The UK is providing urgent food and farming support to Sri Lankans hit hardest by the economic crisis, Lord Ahmad announced today (Friday 23 September).

More than one third of people are struggling to eat and are suffering shortages of fuel, power, and medicines. Sri Lanka has the fifth largest food price inflation in the world, up 93.7% last month, with rice costing 150% more than this time last year.

In a meeting with Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Ali Sabry at the UN General Assembly, Lord Ahmad will set out the UK's package of £3 million lifesaving support.

The funding will be delivered through Red Cross and UN partners. It will provide access to food, seeds, and tools to help grow crops as well as mental health care, including for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

UK Minister of State for the Middle East, South Asia, and the UN, Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon said:

The UK stands by the people of Sri Lanka who are facing such a challenging time. The ongoing crisis is deeply concerning with so many in dire need of help.

We are providing £3 million of lifesaving support to the most vulnerable and will continue to work with international partners to help Sri Lanka.

This new funding is just part of the UK's ongoing support to Sri Lanka. The UK is already providing support through the [UN Central Emergency Response Fund \(CERF\)](#), the [World Bank](#), and the [Asian Development Bank](#).

The UK is the largest donor to the CERF, contributing more than \$1.7 billion to the fund since its inception in 2006 and it has already provided \$5 million to Sri Lanka. The Asian Development Bank and World Bank are providing emergency assistance under a joint action plan to help reduce the impact of economic crisis on the people of Sri Lanka.

**HRC 51: UK statement for the Interactive Dialogue on the report of the OHCHR on Sri Lanka**

**Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office  
20 September 2022**

UK Human Rights Ambassador, Rita French, delivered a statement on the worsening situation in Sri Lanka:

Thank you Mr President,

The United Kingdom welcomes the High Commissioner's comprehensive report.

We recognise the economic challenges facing Sri Lanka, and the hardships these have caused.

In coming together to protest about the economic situation, Sri Lanka's people exercised their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association and freedom of expression. We are dismayed that in response, violence was used against protesters. We are deeply concerned about the arrest and ongoing detention of protestors under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and continue to call for reform of the Act.

We are also concerned about reports of continued militarisation and intimidation impacting on communities in the north and east, including on families of the disappeared. We regret the limited progress made on accountability and justice as requested in HRC resolution 46/1. The domestic reconciliation and accountability process promised in 2020 has not emerged. For these reasons, OHCHR's work collecting and preserving evidence must continue.

We welcome Sri Lanka's recent commitments on respect for the rights of those from all religious and ethnic groups, including through political inclusion and constitutional reform. We stand ready to continue dialogue and support Sri Lanka with this and with the promised approaches to accountability, justice and reconciliation.

Thank You.

**UN Human Rights Council 50: Core Group statement on Sri Lanka**  
**Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**  
**14 June 2022**

The Core Group statement on Sri Lanka was delivered by Ambassador Rita French on behalf of Canada, Germany, Malawi, Montenegro, North Macedonia, the UK and the United State:

Thank you Mr President

This statement is by the Sri Lanka Core Group comprising Canada, Germany, Malawi, Montenegro, North Macedonia, the UK and the United States.

We recognise the significant challenges that Sri Lanka has been facing over recent months, causing great hardship for the Sri Lankan people.

We note that protesters, have exercised their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, and freedom of expression in recent months. We are deeply concerned by violent attacks on peaceful protestors and subsequent violence against government-aligned politicians and supporters. Those responsible for this violence must be held to account.

We stress the crucial importance of upholding democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and maintaining independent institutions. We also urge the Sri Lankan authorities to address long-standing impunity and corruption, and underline the need for good governance and sound economic policies.

Our concerns over surveillance and intimidation of civil society persist and we stress the importance of protecting civil society space.

The Core Group calls on Sri Lanka to cooperate with the High Commissioner and her Office and is ready to support Sri Lanka on the implementation of HRC resolution 46/1.

Thank you.

## 6

## PQs

### Sri Lanka: Human Rights

27 Oct 2022 | 69553

**Asked by: Theresa Villiers**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations he has made to his Sri Lankan counterpart on implementation of the resolution on Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka adopted by UN Human Rights Council at its 51st session in October 2022.

**Answering member: Andrew Mitchell | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

We regularly engage with the Government of Sri Lanka on human rights concerns and stand ready to support implementation of UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) resolution 51/1. The resolution renewed the mandate of the Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to report on Sri Lanka and to protect and preserve evidence of past human rights abuses to use in future accountability processes.

The Minister for South Asia, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, met the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in September, raising the need to engage with UNHRC members and take forward repeated commitments to make progress.

### Sri Lanka: Refugees

17 Oct 2022 | 61369

**Asked by: Kenny MacAskill**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an estimate of the number of Sri Lankan (a) adult and (b) child refugees who are on the British Indian Ocean Territory.

**Answering member: Jesse Norman | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

There are 127 migrants, most of whom are Sri Lankan nationals, on the British Indian Ocean Territory. 25 are children.

### **Sri Lanka: Politics and Government**

**29 Sep 2022 | 46035**

**Asked by: Ruth Jones**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what most recent assessment she has made of the political and security situation in Sri Lanka.

**Answering member: Gillian Keegan | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

We continue to closely monitor the political, economic and security situation in Sri Lanka. The economic situation remains challenging, as inflation continues to increase, and there continues to be shortages of key goods. We welcome the news that the new Government of Sri Lanka has reached staff-level agreement with the International Monetary Fund. This is a positive and important first step to help the country of Sri Lanka recover.

We are in regular high level contact with the new Sri Lankan government on these issues, as well as others of mutual interest.

### **Sri Lanka: Armed Forces**

**28 Sep 2022 | 45608**

**Asked by: Beth Winter**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment she has made of the potential merits of imposing sanctions on (a) the Sri Lankan Chief of Defence Staff, Shavendra Silva, and (b) other members of the Sri Lankan military.

**Answering member: Jesse Norman | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

We keep the situation in Sri Lanka under close review, including in relation to human rights and accountability. Within this, the government keeps under active consideration how to use the diplomatic tools we have including sanctions.

The UK's Global Human Rights Sanctions regime gives the UK Government a powerful mechanism to hold accountable those involved in serious human rights violations or abuses and to send a clear signal of the values we hold.

The UK Government continues to consider designations globally, guided by evidence and the objectives of the human rights sanctions regime; but it is not appropriate to speculate on potential future designations, in order to avoid reducing their impact.

### **Sri Lanka: Development Aid**

**22 Sep 2022 | 47531**

**Asked by: Jim Shannon**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether her Department plans to provide Sri Lanka with official overseas aid to help that country finance essential imports.

**Answering member: Vicky Ford | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

The UK is providing support to Sri Lanka through multilateral institutions, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (WB) and United Nations (UN). The World Bank (WB) has reprogrammed US\$ 400 million in financial assistance to provide economic and health sector support to Sri Lanka. The UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has announced US\$5 million for an urgent response to the economic crisis to support approximately 650,000 of the most vulnerable people in Sri Lanka. The UK is the largest overall donor to the CERF, contributing more than \$1.7 billion to the fund since its inception fifteen years ago.

The Minister for South Asia, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, re-iterated the UK's support to Sri Lanka when he spoke to President Wickremesinghe on 23 July and Prime Minister Gunawardena on 16 August. We keep under review our response to the humanitarian needs of the Sri Lankan people.

### **Sri Lanka: Politics and Government**

**07 Sep 2022 | 42268**

**Asked by: Sam Tarry**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether the UK plans to put forward resolutions on Sri Lanka at the September session of the UNHRC regarding accountability for atrocities.

**Answering member: Vicky Ford | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

In March 2021, the UK Government and our Core Group partners led an ambitious new resolution (46/1) on Sri Lanka at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). The resolution provides a continued framework for international engagement on human rights in Sri Lanka, and highlights serious concerns about the situation, including those detailed in the January 2021 report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). It calls on the government of Sri Lanka to make progress on accountability and human rights, and stresses the importance of a comprehensive accountability process for all violations and abuses committed in Sri Lanka. It keeps Sri Lanka firmly on the UNHRC agenda and requests continued and enhanced OHCHR reporting on the human rights

situation and on accountability. Importantly, it also strengthened the capacity of OHCHR to collect, consolidate, preserve and analyse information and evidence to support future accountability processes. We continue to make clear our human rights concerns in statements made to the UNHRC, most recently on 14 June 2022. We will work with our partners to maintain the UNHRC's focus on Sri Lanka in the future.

### **Sri Lanka: Politics and Government**

**06 Sep 2022 | 42266**

**Asked by: Sam Tarry**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps her Department is taking to help ensure a peaceful transfer of power in Sri Lanka following the announcement of President Rajapaksa's resignation.

**Answering member: Vicky Ford | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

The UK looks forward to working with Ranil Wickremesinghe following his election as President of Sri Lanka by the Sri Lankan parliament as part of a peaceful transition of power. We continue to call for a peaceful, democratic and inclusive approach to resolving the current political and economic challenges. In his recent call with Prime Minister Gunawardena on 16 August the Minister responsible for South Asia, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, called on the Sri Lankan Government to build an inclusive consensus for the reforms necessary to bring Sri Lanka's economy back on a sustainable path. Lord Ahmad also discussed efforts to build a multi-party government with President Wickremesinghe on 23 July. We welcome the Sri Lanka Government's engagement with members of the opposition and we call for the ambitions and hopes of all citizens and communities to be listened to as Sri Lanka builds its future. We continue to engage with members of Sri Lankan civil society to encourage inclusive, peaceful and democratic solutions to Sri Lanka's ongoing challenges.

### **Sri Lanka**

**21 Jul 2022 | 823 cc2043-2038**

**Asked by: Lord Moylan**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to give urgent material assistance to Sri Lanka to alleviate the economic crisis in that country.

**Answered by: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

My Lords, we are closely monitoring the humanitarian and economic situation in Sri Lanka. The United Kingdom provides assistance to organisations in both these areas in Sri Lanka, including through the Red Cross and the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund; the UN Central Emergency Response Fund, CERF; the World Bank; and the Asian Development Bank. We have offered to support a key role in the UN on humanitarian co-ordination. This is in addition to our existing £11.3 million CSSF programme funding focused on addressing the legacy of conflict.

**Sri Lanka**

**21 Jul 2022 | 823 c2036**

**Asked by: Lord Howell of Guildford**

My Lords, is my noble friend aware that the Commonwealth Secretariat is in close touch with the situation and seeking ways in which it can assist in this very difficult position. Would he make sure that his colleagues in the Foreign Office co-ordinate closely with the Commonwealth Secretariat, as this may be the best channel, or one of the best channels, to co-ordinate efforts to ensure that Sri Lanka does not fall too rapidly into the Russian orbit, the Chinese orbit, or indeed both?

**Answered by: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

I can give that assurance to my noble friend, not least in my role as Minister for the Commonwealth. I reassure him that, during the Kigali summit, we met directly with key Commonwealth partners. Foreign Minister GL Peiris was there, who is still in situ in the new Government. We are engaging directly and bilaterally, and scoping what level of co-operation we can offer Sri Lanka, including on the positive progress that has been made thus far, in a dire situation, through the IMF support, to ensure that Sri Lanka sustains itself as a democracy that is inclusive to all people.

**Sri Lanka: Religious Freedom**

**11 Jul 2022 | 27618**

**Asked by: Jim Shannon**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps she is taking to help ensure that UK (a) aid to and (b) trade deals with Sri Lanka are dependent on the protection of freedom of religious belief in that country.



**Answering member: Vicky Ford | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

The UK Government regularly raises the importance of religious tolerance and protecting the rights of all Sri Lankans to practise their faith. Staff at the British High Commission in Colombo regularly meet representatives of faith communities and affected ethnoreligious communities to hear their concerns. The High Commissioner most recently met with civil society delegates to the freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) ministerial conference. FoRB was a key theme during the Minister of State for South Asia, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad's visit to Sri Lanka in January 2022, where he also met faith leaders.

In March 2021, the UK Government and our Core Group partners led resolution 46/1 on Sri Lanka at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). The resolution provides a framework for international engagement on human rights in Sri Lanka, and highlights serious concerns about the situation including FoRB. We have also provided funding from the UK's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund to support work on social cohesion and countering hate speech. Sri Lanka has access to zero tariffs on certain exports to the UK as part of the Enhanced Framework of the UK's Generalised Scheme of Preferences. Countries that are part of the Enhanced Framework must implement 27 conventions relating to human and labour rights, the environment, and good governance.

**[Sri Lanka: Peace Negotiations](#)**

**11 Jul 2022 | 26027**

**Asked by: Fleur Anderson**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps the Government is taking to work with the international community to help bring peaceful resolution to Sri Lanka's political crisis.

**Answering member: Vicky Ford | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

We are closely monitoring the political, economic and security situation in Sri Lanka. We encourage all sides to find a peaceful, democratic, and inclusive approach to resolving the current political and economic challenges. We also call on the authorities to safeguard citizen's rights, and ensure security responses are proportionate and in line with international human rights standards. The Minister responsible for South Asia, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, has emphasised that violence against peaceful protestors is unacceptable. Those responsible for attacks should be held to account. Fundamental rights including the right to peaceful protest, must be protected. The UK High Commissioner to Sri Lanka has called for independent and transparent investigations into violence against peaceful protesters.

In March 2021, the UK Government and our Core Group partners led an ambitious new resolution (46/1) on Sri Lanka at the UNHRC. The resolution provides a continued framework for international engagement on human rights in Sri Lanka, and highlights serious concerns about the situation, including those detailed in the January 2021 report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). We continue to make clear our concerns in statements made to the UN Human Rights Council, most recently on 14 June 2022. Lord Ahmad also raised the need to make progress on human rights and accountability when he met Foreign Minister Peiris on 15 June 2022.

### **Sri Lanka: Development Aid**

**27 Jun 2022 | 21170**

#### **Asked by: Dr Matthew Offord**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what aid programmes have been designated to increase food production in Sri Lanka.

#### **Answering member: Vicky Ford | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

The UK is closely monitoring the political, economic, and security situation in Sri Lanka, particularly as it relates to food insecurity and livelihoods. We are working to support the UN and its agencies in their coordinated response based on the UN's recent joint Humanitarian Needs and Priorities (HNP) Plan, launched on 9 June. This called for USD 47.2 million to provide life-saving assistance to 1.7 million people who are most at risk and need immediate support. This includes USD 13.94 million to support food security and USD 16.8 million to support agriculture and livelihoods.

The UK contributes to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) Operation in Sri Lanka. The DREF is supporting the Sri Lanka Red Cross with an allocation of approximately CHF 691,002 in response to shortages and civil unrest. The World Bank, of which the UK is a major donor, has announced over USD 400 million of assistance to provide economic and health sector support.

### **Sri Lanka: Tamils**

**27 Jun 2022 | 19666**

#### **Asked by: Stephen Morgan**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether her Department is taking steps to ensure that those responsible for human rights violations against the Tamil community in Sri Lanka are brought to justice in the International Criminal Court.

**Answering member: Vicky Ford | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

Sri Lanka is a human rights priority country for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. Our assessment is that an International Criminal Court (ICC) referral would not have the required support from members of the UN Security Council. It would not advance the cause of accountability for an ICC referral to fail to win Security Council support or to be vetoed.

We, alongside our partners in the Core Group on Sri Lanka, have led international efforts over many years to promote accountability, reconciliation and human rights in Sri Lanka. On 23 March 2021 the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) adopted resolution 46/1, which provides a continued framework for international engagement on human rights. It calls on the government of Sri Lanka to make progress on human rights and stresses the importance of a comprehensive accountability process for all violations and abuses committed in Sri Lanka. The Minister of State for South Asia, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, visited Sri Lanka in January 2022. He travelled to the North and East as well as Colombo and met a range of civil society groups, including Tamil representatives, to discuss human rights. The Minister also urged the Government of Sri Lanka to take steps to deliver justice and accountability.

**Topical Questions**

**21 Jun 2022 | 716 c691**

**Asked by: Anne McLaughlin**

In answer to an earlier question about Sri Lanka, the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford), said that she would continue to lobby the Sri Lankan Government, but that Government, and their military, are populated in part by people who are credibly accused of war crimes in a civil war that ended more than 10 years ago. The Americans thought that there was enough evidence to impose economic sanctions on some of those individuals. Is lobbying really the best that she can do?

**Answered by: Vicky Ford | Department: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

On Sri Lanka, let me start by absolutely emphasising again that violence against peaceful protesters is unacceptable. We absolutely condemn the violence we see happening at the moment and we are urging everybody towards calm. We will continue to work to make sure that we support the country through funding from our conflict, stability and security fund, which has supported peacebuilding, and we continue to respect the independence of the prosecutor when it comes to investigating war crimes of the past.

### Sri Lanka: Human Rights

21 Jun 2022 | 716 c698

**Asked by: Catherine West**

Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Later this week, Commonwealth leaders will meet in Kigali for the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, and this will include Sri Lanka. We expect the Government to voice their concerns about the long-term peace and justice issues, but pressing economic matters will also threaten stability, both within Sri Lanka and in the region. Will the Government go above and beyond what the IMF is offering and recognise the role of the Commonwealth now to step into the leadership gap and support Sri Lanka's people with access to food and medicines, by helping to bring economic stability as soon as possible to this great friend of the UK?

**Answered by: Vicky Ford | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

The hon. Lady is absolutely right to say that Sri Lanka is a great friend of the UK. Indeed, our Prime Minister spoke to his Sri Lankan counterpart on 30 May and has underlined the UK's continuing support for the people of Sri Lanka during their economic difficulties. He has offered UK support through multilateral organisations such as the World Bank and IMF, and international forums such as the Paris Club. We have a very significant voice on international debt forums and we are working closely with Paris Club members and multilateral organisations to find solutions to the debt crisis.

### Sri Lanka: British Nationals Abroad

20 May 2022 | 831

**Asked by: Alberto Costa**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps her Department is taking to ensure the safety of British nationals in Sri Lanka in light of the recent civil unrest in that country.

**Answering member: Vicky Ford | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

The UK Government takes the safety and security of British nationals overseas seriously, and regularly communicates through travel advice and messaging from the British High Commission in Colombo. Our advice helps British nationals to make informed decisions. Travel advice is advisory only and people must take personal responsibility for any trips they make abroad. Our travel advice remains under constant review to ensure it reflects our latest assessment of risks. Consular staff continue to provide a full range of consular services to British nationals in Sri Lanka. We continue to monitor the situation in Sri Lanka.

We are closely following the situation since attacks against peaceful protesters on 9 May and outbreaks of violence that followed. The Minister for South Asia, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, has made clear that violence against peaceful protestors is unacceptable and that those responsible for attacks should be held accountable. Fundamental rights including the right to peaceful protest must be protected. We encourage all sides to find a democratic and inclusive approach to resolving the current political and economic challenges.

### **Sri Lanka**

**16 May 2022 | 822 c237**

#### **Asked by: Viscount Waverley**

My Lords, this is becoming a desperate state of affairs, as we all agree. Is there a concern that Sri Lanka's plight, with all the shortages, could be an indicator, globally, of a stark new world order that will affect many emerging countries in a similar manner? The point has been made about China. Is it conceivable that a future Chinese military base could be stationed in Sri Lanka and therefore be at the centre of our Indo-Pacific priority?

#### **Answered by: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

My Lords, the current crisis that Sri Lanka faces did not happen all of a sudden. It is important to look at steps such as the IMF's intervention. With hindsight, I am sure many voices in Sri Lanka are asking whether it should have been sooner or earlier—but we are where we are, and it is important now that, through the IMF and the World Bank, we look at ensuring, first things first, that this debt can be restructured in a way that allows Sri Lanka to move forward.

On the wider issue of China's reach in the Indo-Pacific, we need to work constructively with our key partners. That is why, when it comes to infrastructure development, as I said when I visited Sri Lanka, through our own initiatives with key partners we need to offer an alternative method that allows a country not to be indebted but to service its debt and, at the same time, to move forward constructively.

### **Sri Lanka**

**16 May 2022 | 822 c236**

#### **Asked by: Lord Naseby**

Does my noble friend recognise that Sri Lanka was a founder member of the Commonwealth and stood by our country in relation to the Chagos Islands and the Falklands? First, does he agree that at this time Sri Lanka needs real, practical help rather than theoretical help? I declare that I was there just over

five weeks ago. That practical help means medicines and possibly some help with energy. Secondly, should we not be promoting in the medium term the advantages of Port City Colombo, which is a major investment for our country, to renew our connections? Thirdly and finally, should we not recognise for the record that were it not for Mahinda Rajapaksa, there would have been a terrorist rogue state in the northern part of Sri Lanka and that at least he did that well?

**Answered by: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

My Lords, like my noble friend I have recently visited Sri Lanka. As well as focusing—rightly, I believe—on the important issues of justice, reconciliation and accountability, I focused on practical steps to strengthen our bilateral relationship with Sri Lanka, including on issues of trade and the port that my noble friend mentioned. On immediate support in the crisis, I have said already that we are working through the World Bank and that the \$600 million includes assistance to provide economic and health support, including vital medicines and medical equipment. We are engaging directly with the new Prime Minister through our high commissioner to ensure that Sri Lanka’s priorities are fully understood. We will give support as appropriate.

**Sri Lanka**

**16 May 2022 | 822 c235**

**Asked by: Lord Moylan**

My Lords, Sri Lanka is an important Commonwealth country. Although I welcome the fact that the Government are monitoring the situation, I would have hoped something a little more vigorous and direct might become available at the moment. We are in danger of seeing our neglect of Sri Lanka over time leading it to drift off into the malign sphere of China. If the Government could be a little more helpful in terms of practical help at the moment, I also ask my noble friend whether we could do something in the longer term that would help: as friends of mine in Sri Lanka have requested, help them put in place the governance and parliamentary structures that would help to combat defalcation in the future and restore public confidence in the expenditure of public funds.

**Answered by: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

My Lords, I assure my noble friend that we are working in very practical terms. Indeed, at the start of this year, as the Minister for South Asia, I visited Sri Lanka myself and engaged directly with the Government in Colombo, and also visited other parts of the country to ensure that all voices across Sri Lanka are fully heard and engaged with when it comes to the United Kingdom’s approach. My noble friend is also correct that we are looking at practical support and working through agencies, particularly the World Bank

and the IMF, to look at the immediate issues of the debt, which needs to be put on to a sustainable footing. We are also in very structured dialogue through the high commissioner directly, with whom I am engaging on a daily basis, to ensure that the political and the security situation are sustained, which allows peaceful protest but at the same time prevents violence, which has been seen during the protests since this emergency began.

### **Sri Lanka: Crimes of Violence**

**27 Apr 2022 | 156561**

#### **Asked by: Dr Rupa Huq**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether she has made representations to her Sri Lankan counterpart regarding recent reports of unlawful violence being perpetrated by police authorities against civilians in Sri Lanka.

#### **Answering member: Vicky Ford | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

The UK Government is concerned by recent reports of violence during protests in Sri Lanka and encourages all sides to find a peaceful, democratic and inclusive approach to resolve Sri Lanka's political and economic challenges.

The Minister of State for South Asia, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, has urged for the right to protest peacefully to be protected and for violence to cease.

The UK High Commissioner to Sri Lanka met the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka on 20 April. The High Commissioner has called for an independent and transparent investigation into the loss of life during protests in Rambukkana on 19 April.

We regularly discuss our concerns about human rights with the Government of Sri Lanka. Lord Ahmad raised the need to improve human rights and deliver justice and accountability with the Sri Lankan President and Foreign Minister when he visited Sri Lanka. The Foreign Secretary raised the importance of upholding human rights when she met Foreign Minister Peiris.

## 7 Further Parliamentary material

### 7.1 Debates

#### [Sri Lanka](#)

**18 Mar 2021 | House of Commons | 691 cc542-572**

Motion that this House notes with concern the reports of a systematic attack in Sri Lanka on democratic governance, the rule of law and human rights including renewed discrimination against the Tamil and Muslim communities; is profoundly concerned that the Sri Lankan Government has refused to investigate accusations of war crimes including by key members of the current government and has withdrawn from the UN Human Rights Council Resolution 30/1; welcomes the significant leadership role played by successive UK Governments at the Human Rights Council and urges the Government to provide clear policy direction and leadership to ensure a new substantive resolution is passed at the upcoming Council session in March 2021 that will enable continued monitoring by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and mandate a mechanism to gather, preserve and analyse evidence of violations for future investigations and prosecutions; and calls upon the Government to develop a consistent and coherent policy to assist the Sri Lankan people through its trade, investment and aid programmes, and in its diplomatic and military relations. Agreed to on question. Sitting suspended.

### 7.2 Urgent Questions

#### [Sri Lanka](#)

**13 Jul 2022 | House of Commons | 718 cc345-352**

Urgent question on the state of emergency declared in Sri Lanka.



## 7.3

### Statements

#### Sri Lanka

13 Jul 2022 | House of Lords | 823 cc1485-8

**The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon):** My Lords, with the leave of the House, I shall now repeat in the form of a Statement the Answer given by my right honourable friend the Minister for Asia and the Middle East to an Urgent Question in another place on the state of emergency declared today in Sri Lanka. The Statement is as follows:

“We are closely monitoring the fast-moving and fluid political, economic and security situation in Sri Lanka. The Minister of State for South Asia has engaged directly with our high commissioner and the team on the ground. We encourage all sides to find a peaceful, democratic and inclusive approach to resolving the current political and economic challenges.

Sri Lanka’s political and economic challenges should be resolved through an inclusive and cross-party process. Any transition of power should be peaceful, constitutional and democratic, and I call on all parties to exercise restraint and refrain from violence.”

## 7.4

### Early Day Motions

#### Political and economic situation in Sri Lanka

EDM 297 (session 2022-23)

15 July 2022

Ed Davey

That this House notes the developing political and economic crisis in Sri Lanka; acknowledges the widespread corruption and economic mismanagement at the hands of the Rajapaksa government that led to protests in the first place; recognises that the economic solution needed to address this situation must be coupled with political reform that involves all minority groups and includes accountability for human rights abuses and atrocities which have been carried out against Tamils; notes the allegations of human rights abuses levelled against Gotabaya Rajapaksa; urges the International Criminal Court to fully investigate those claims; and calls on the Government to work with its international partners to press for peaceful political reform in Sri Lanka.

### Disclaimer

The Commons Library does not intend the information in our research publications and briefings to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. We have published it to support the work of MPs. You should not rely upon it as legal or professional advice, or as a substitute for it. We do not accept any liability whatsoever for any errors, omissions or misstatements contained herein. You should consult a suitably qualified professional if you require specific advice or information. Read our briefing '[Legal help: where to go and how to pay](#)' for further information about sources of legal advice and help. This information is provided subject to the conditions of the Open Parliament Licence.

### Feedback

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email [papers@parliament.uk](mailto:papers@parliament.uk). Please note that authors are not always able to engage in discussions with members of the public who express opinions about the content of our research, although we will carefully consider and correct any factual errors.

You can read our feedback and complaints policy and our editorial policy at [commonslibrary.parliament.uk](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk). If you have general questions about the work of the House of Commons email [hcenquiries@parliament.uk](mailto:hcenquiries@parliament.uk).

The House of Commons Library is a research and information service based in the UK Parliament. Our impartial analysis, statistical research and resources help MPs and their staff scrutinise legislation, develop policy, and support constituents.

Our published material is available to everyone on [commonslibrary.parliament.uk](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk).

Get our latest research delivered straight to your inbox. Subscribe at [commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe) or scan the code below:



 [commonslibrary.parliament.uk](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk)

 [@commonslibrary](https://twitter.com/commonslibrary)