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The human rights situation in Sri Lanka continued to improve in the second half of 2015, although concerns remained.

Parliamentary elections held in August were [described](#) as the “most peaceful in the country’s recent history” by the EU Election Observation Mission who, along with the Commonwealth, were invited by the government to observe the polls. The British High Commission also funded domestic observation efforts, which helped ensure that levels of violence, misuse of resources, and intimidation fell significantly from previous election campaigns.

In September, FCO Minister for Asia, Hugo Swire, [welcomed](#) the publication by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) [report](#) of its investigation into allegations of serious violations and abuses of human rights in Sri Lanka. It called on the government of Sri Lanka to address accountability for the most serious human rights violations and crimes, end the impunity enjoyed by the security forces and associated paramilitary groups, and hold to account surviving members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The report made a number of further recommendations including: the establishment of a fully-fledged country presence for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); clear, public and unequivocal instructions to all branches of the military and security forces on the unacceptability of torture, rape, sexual violence and other human rights violations; and an end to all surveillance, harassment and reprisals against human rights defenders.

On 1 October, Sri Lanka co-sponsored a UN Human Rights Council (HRC) resolution titled “Promoting Reconciliation, Accountability and Human Rights in Sri Lanka”. It committed the government to establishing a credible judicial mechanism, and affirmed the importance of the participation of Commonwealth and other foreign judges, defence lawyers and authorised prosecutors and investigators, to investigate allegations of violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law. During the HRC session, Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera made a number of other commitments including to: review and repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA); maintain the moratorium on the death penalty with a view to its ultimate abolition; and to review the Witness Protection Act.

In November, the government invited the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) to Sri Lanka. The WGEID [welcomed](#) the government's commitment to address disappearances. It also called on the government to bring in domestic legislation, and to ratify Additional Protocols to the Geneva Convention, and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, to ensure such practices are not repeated. On 10 December, Sri Lanka signed the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

In addition, a number of positive steps were taken by the Sri Lankan government to improve human rights and democracy. In November the government announced that 39 long-term detainees held under the PTA without charge had been granted bail, and committed to review the cases of the remaining detainees. The UK and other international partners have called for this process to be accelerated. In November the Sri Lankan government de-proscribed a number of organisations and individuals, including the British Tamil Forum and the Global Tamil Forum.

Freedom of expression continued to improve. Investigations were re-opened and arrests made in a number of historic high-profile cases of murder and disappearances of MPs and journalists. A number of armed forces personnel were convicted for rape and murder.

While there has been notable progress, areas of concern remain.

Despite a significant reduction in surveillance and harassment by the security forces, we continued to receive some reports of this happening in the North and East. The WGEID raised concerns on its visit to Sri Lanka, and called on the government to put an end to these activities.

The OHCHR report observed that "torture and sexual violence remain a critical concern, both in relation to the conflict and in the regular criminal justice system". NGO reports from [Human Rights Watch](#), [International Truth & Justice Project](#), and [Freedom From Torture](#) include a number of allegations of torture (particularly in police custody), sexual violence, and disappearances in Sri Lanka in 2015. The UK has urged the government to investigate these and all other allegations of human rights abuses.

The UK continues to encourage and support the government of Sri Lanka in fulfilling its commitments to improve human rights and democracy, and to address the issues of the past. Welcoming the HRC resolution in October, Prime Minister David Cameron said "Today's resolution is a crucial step towards uncovering the truth about alleged war crimes in Sri Lanka, ensuring accountability for the past and respect for human rights now and in the future. Britain is committed to standing up for those affected by Sri Lanka's civil war, and has been instrumental in the United Nations investigation and adoption of this resolution. I welcome the Sri Lankan government's commitment to ensuring those responsible are held to account and I encourage them to continue to work with the UN".

The UK continued to fund project work to improve human rights in 2015, including to develop a more professional and accountable civilian police force. Other areas of UK support included funding interfaith dialogues aimed at easing religious and communal tensions, and documentation projects to aid advocacy on the prevention of torture and ending sexual and gender-based violence.

In November at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Malta, the Prime Minister announced an additional £6.6m package of support to assist the Sri Lankan government's efforts to fulfil its commitments made to the HRC.