



Genocide Watch
The Alliance Against Genocide

Country Report: Sri Lanka September 2021

Sri Lanka is still recovering from a 26-year civil war that ended in May 2009 with victory by the Sinhalese majority government over Tamil Tiger separatists. National reconciliation is marred by obstruction of accountability or justice for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed against Tamils during the civil war, and by continuing discrimination against Tamils and Muslims.

Lasting from 1983 to 2009, the [Civil War](#) was precipitated by systematic discrimination against the Tamil minority by the Sinhalese majority. Tamils have always been treated as second class citizens. In 1983 the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) launched a separatist rebellion to establish an independent Tamil state in northern Sri Lanka. The Tigers were noted for terrorist suicide bombings using girls as bombers.

In the Civil War, both Tamil Tigers and Sri Lankan Army committed crimes against humanity and war crimes. Massacres of Tamils, particularly in the final months of the civil war, have been [characterized as genocide](#). The Army has been accused of shelling hospitals, burning alive Tamil civilians, executing prisoners of war, and preventing food, medicine, and clean water from reaching civilians trapped in the war zones.

The [United Nations Human Rights Council \(UNHRC\)](#) has given UN rights chief, Michelle Bachelet, a mandate to collect evidence of war crimes in Sri Lanka during the Civil War. [President Gotabaya Rajapaksa](#), former commander of the Army and an accused war criminal himself, continues to shield and pardon convicted war criminals like army sergeant Sunil Ratnayake, who was convicted and sentenced to death by a Sri Lankan Court. Presidential pardon of war criminals has created a grave impunity crisis in Sri Lanka.

In January 2021, the [Mullivaikal Memorial](#) at Jaffna University, constructed in memory of those who lost their lives in the war, was demolished upon orders of Rajapaksa. It was evidence of the government's official policy of **Denial**.

Growing intolerance towards the Muslim minority has emerged since 2012. Since 2009, a virulent [hate campaign](#) spearheaded by the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) has led to many attacks on Muslims. They include the [2014 riots](#) in the coastal district of *Kalutara* and the [2018 riots](#) in Ampara. In March 2021, the government announced a [ban on wearing burqas](#) and its plan to close one thousand Islamic schools. The [Prevention of Terrorism Act \(PTA\)](#), gives the state powers to detain suspects for up to two years without charges. It is being used to arrest Muslim activists on 'national security' grounds.

Genocide Watch recognizes discriminatory laws coupled with arbitrary arrest and torture of journalists and activists as **Stage 3: Discrimination**, **Stage 5: Organization**, and **Stage 8: Persecution**. President Rajapaksa's pardons of war criminals promote impunity and **Stage 10: Denial**.

Genocide Watch recommends:

- Sri Lanka should fully cooperate with the UN Human Rights Commissioner's investigation of war crimes during the Civil War.
- Sri Lanka should repeal its Prevention of Terrorism Act and stop detaining Muslims without charges.
- The U.N. Security Council should refer the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the Civil War to the International Criminal Court.

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