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GLOBAL SRI LANKAN FORUM

Executive Committee

MIDDLE EAST | EUROPE | AUSTRALIA | NORTH AMERICA

MEDIA RELEASE

20th February 2020

US DECISION TO RESTRICT SRI LANKAN ARMY COMMANDER'S TRAVEL TO USA

The Global Sri Lanka Forum –Executive Committee (GSLF-Ex. Com.) condemns decision by the US Government to restrict Lieutenant General Shavindra Silva and his family members' travel to USA. At the same time, we commend the position taken by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and the Foreign Minister Hon Dinesh Gunawardena who unreservedly supported Lieutenant Gen Shavindra Silva, correctly identifying him as one of the chief architects of the defensive war which erased the LTTE Tamil Tiger terrorist threat from Sri Lanka.

USA has a very poor track record in respecting the tenets of war crimes. Instances are numerous of USA and some of the Western nations completely ignoring war crimes charges levelled at their armed forces, and bringing ridicule to the UN organizations which attempted to probe the brazen violations of the war crimes rules.

In an article on US attempts to impose a visa ban on UN prosecutors of war crimes investigating crimes committed by the perpetrators of US armed forces, the director of the Centre for Strategic and International studies at Washington DC penned the following;

"In an unprecedented step, the Trump administration enacted a visa ban on the chief prosecutor of the ICC in reaction to a continued probe by the ICC regarding whether the United States has satisfactorily prosecuted CIA and military abuses of detainees in Afghanistan. The visa ban is a measure the United States normally reserves for war criminals, not those who prosecute them. The administration also threatened to sanction the court's personnel, measures that are probably not even lawful, according to John Bellinger, former legal advisor to George W. Bush's State Department. The visa ban was an unnecessary and drastic measure. Even if the Trump administration continues to oppose the ICC, there are other ways to do so that look more principled and less personal, such as diplomacy".

Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Ireland, Poland, Russia, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Sweden, United Arab Emirates

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Finally, the Trump administration stood by the alleged offenders of the US armed forces. James Goldston, the executive director of the Open Society Justice Initiative, said Pompeo's remarks reflected the administration's view that international law matters "*only when it is aligned with US national interests*".

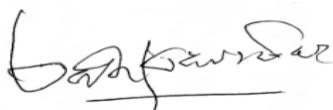
Similarly, the UK government and the British army were accused of war crimes committed in Iraq and Afghanistan. The British authorities too ignored the charges, and proceeded to strike off the solicitor Phil Shine from practicing after he had collected information of more than 1000 cases of war crimes alleged to have committed by the British forces.

It is more than clear that the USA considers war crimes as a political lever to seek advantage in her manipulations to position globally. In regard to Sri Lanka, it is assumed that latest steps taken by the USA to focus on Lieutenant General Silva, the Army Commander of Sri Lanka, are to put pressure on the nationalist government of President Gotabaya Rajapaksh who replaced the servile pro-USA government of President Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasingha. We believe that the travel ban to be directly linked to the Millennium Challenge Compact (MCC) that the US Congress is keen for Sri Lanka to sign.

We refer to the earlier statement attributed to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo where he reflected the administration's view that international law matters "*only when it is aligned with US national interests*". It's no secret that the US Government wishes to enter into bilateral agreements with Sri Lanka directly linked to its Indo-Pacific Security Strategy such as the Acquisition and Cross Service Agreement (ACSA) and the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). If its wishes have any hope of further negotiations, USA has to treat Sri Lanka with respect and as a friend. Trying to bully and bludgeon her to submission using threats similar to travel restrictions imposed on Lieutenant General Shavindra Silva, are destined to fail.

If USA is a true friend of Sri Lanka and wants to improve bi-lateral relationships between the two countries, it has to reconsider the travel ban imposed on Lieutenant General Silva as the decision is baseless, unjust and predicated on innuendo and blatant lies parroted by LTTE diaspora and its paid supporters including Yasmin Sooka and biased journalist Frances Harrison.

We hope president Trump will see through the web of deceit crafted by State Department bureaucrats justifying their decision, and rectify the situation by lifting the travel ban with immediate effect. Otherwise, it loses credibility in the eyes of the Sri Lankan public, risking further alienating Sri Lanka of US Indo-Pacific Security Strategy.



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