

US urged to investigate Sri Lanka President during surprise visit

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Amnesty International Calls on the United States to Investigate Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa During his Surprise Visit to the United States

(Washington, D.C.) The United States should investigate Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa, who arrives on a surprise visit to the United States today, for his alleged role in perpetrating torture and war crimes, Amnesty International said today.

Rajapaksa reportedly left Sri Lanka early Wednesday morning with a delegation of 20 bound for the United States.

"The United States has an obligation under international law to investigate and prosecute people who perpetrated war crimes and grave human rights violations such as extrajudicial executions, torture and enforced disappearances," said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific director.

Rajapaksa is commander in chief of Sri Lanka's armed forces, which face numerous allegations of engaging in war crimes, enforced disappearances, and torture. Under international law, military commanders may face criminal responsibility if they knew, or should have known, of such crimes being committed by their subordinates.

The president's visit comes as a Panel of Experts appointed by United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon works on a report advising him on accountability issues in Sri Lanka. Both Sri Lankan government forces and members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are accused of having committed war crimes in the final phase of the decades-long conflict.

Amnesty International has called for the United Nations to initiate an international investigation.

"Thousands of victims in Sri Lanka demand accountability for the abuses they've suffered from the Sri Lankan security forces as well as armed groups such as the LTTE," Zarifi said.

In December Wikileaks exposed a secret United States Embassy cable sent by Ambassador Patricia Butenis from Colombo in which she noted the difficulty of bringing perpetrators of alleged crimes to justice when "responsibility for many of the alleged crimes rests with the country's senior civilian and military leadership, including President Rajapaksa and his brothers"

The United States should further investigate these allegations and support calls for an international investigation into Sri Lanka's role in war crimes.

Amnesty International is a Nobel Peace Prize-winning grassroots activist organization with more than 2.8 million supporters, activists and volunteers in more than 150 countries campaigning for human rights worldwide. The organization investigates and exposes abuses, educates and mobilizes

the public, and works to protect people wherever justice, freedom, truth and dignity are denied.
