

117TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. RES. _____

Expressing the sense of the Senate in support of the peaceful democratic and economic aspirations of the Sri Lankan people.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. MENENDEZ (for himself, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. LEAHY, and Mr. BOOKER) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on _____

RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of the Senate in support of the peaceful democratic and economic aspirations of the Sri Lankan people.

Whereas Sri Lanka gained its independence peacefully in 1948, bringing an end to British colonial rule;

Whereas, more than 100,000 Sri Lankans died or went missing in subsequent decades of ethnic conflict, most acutely at the end of the civil war in May 2009;

Whereas the roots of the conflict, including historical inequalities, remain largely unresolved;

Whereas the period of peace, which began in 2009, contributed to Sri Lanka's high growth and economic development, building on a tourism-based economy;

Whereas Gotabaya Rajapaksa was elected as Sri Lanka's President on November 16, 2019, and on November 21, 2019, he appointed his brother, Mahinda Rajapaksa, as Prime Minister;

Whereas Sri Lanka's governance under President Rajapaksa was highly corrupt, nepotistic, and lacked transparency;

Whereas on August 8, 2020, Human Rights Watch described President Rajapaksa's rule in 2020 as "a campaign of fear and intimidation against human rights activists, journalists, lawyers, and others challenging government policy";

Whereas the Government of Sri Lanka declined \$480,000,000 in United States assistance in 2020 in the form of a grant from the Millennium Challenge Corporation, which was designed to reduce poverty through economic growth;

Whereas, the Government of Sri Lanka, under the rule of President Rajapaksa—

- (1) devoted state resources for personal political purposes with little transparency;
- (2) implemented misguided agricultural policies; and
- (3) borrowed billions of dollars from China to develop economically unviable mega projects;

Whereas, since 2019, Sri Lanka has faced an economic crisis, only further exacerbated by predatory loans from the People's Republic of China as part of its debt trap diplomacy;

Whereas Sri Lanka's economic crisis caused millions of Sri Lankan citizens to live in extremely dire conditions, with severe shortages of medicine, food, and fuel;

Whereas many Sri Lankans have immigrated in search of income to support their families as a result of the ongoing crises, often separating spouses and parents from children;

Whereas, beginning in March 2022, the citizens of Sri Lanka courageously exercised their fundamental freedoms of speech and assembly to peacefully protest the government's failed economic policies and repression;

Whereas, the Government of Sri Lanka failed to make its bond and loan payments in April 2022, resulting in the country's first financial default in May 2022;

Whereas tens of thousands of Sri Lankan citizens rallied in largely peaceful protests on July 9, 2022, to which the government responded with live fire and tear gas;

Whereas the events of July 9, 2022, demonstrated that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has lost the confidence of the Sri Lankan people;

Whereas, on July 20, 2022, the parliament of Sri Lanka elected Ranil Wickremesinghe as President of Sri Lanka;

Whereas the current Government of Sri Lanka has thus far failed to respond to public concerns, including establishment of transparent investigations into credible allegations of corruption;

Whereas, on July 13, 2022, amid mounting public protests, Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled Sri Lanka for Singapore where he formally resigned as president, only to return to Sri Lanka on September 3, 2022;

Whereas the Government of Sri Lanka has used the country's Prevention of Terrorism Act to target peaceful political opposition;

Whereas the United States cosponsored United Nations Human Rights Council resolution, HRC 46/1 (2021), includes strengthening the capacity of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to collect, analyze, and preserve information and evidence for future accountability processes for gross violations of human rights in Sri Lanka;

Whereas the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, issued a report on February 25, 2022, noting setbacks in efforts to hold individuals accountable for human rights violations in Sri Lanka and highlighting the need for “deeper institutional and security sector reforms that will end impunity and prevent the recurrence of violations of the past”;

Whereas the September 2022 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Report on Sri Lanka stated, “[f]or sustainable improvements to take place, however, it is vital to recognize and address the underlying factors which have contributed to the economic crisis, including embedded impunity for past and present human rights violations, economic crimes, and endemic corruption”;

Whereas the United Nations Human Rights Council will discuss the human rights situation in Sri Lanka at its upcoming 51st regular session in September 2022; and

Whereas President Wickremesinghe announced that Sri Lanka—

(1) would restart bailout negotiations with the International Monetary Fund in August 2022; and

(2) had reached an initial agreement on September 1, 2022: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the Senate—

1 (1) supports the peaceful democratic and eco-
2 nomic aspirations of the Sri Lankan people;

3 (2) urges Sri Lankan security forces to respect
4 the legitimate rights of Sri Lankans, including to
5 protest peacefully;

6 (3) urges Sri Lankan President
7 Wickremesinghe to work with opposition parties on
8 behalf of all Sri Lankans, including Tamils, Mus-
9 lims, and other religious and ethnic minorities;

10 (4) commends the United States Agency for
11 International Development for announcing more
12 than \$92,000,000 in economic and humanitarian as-
13 sistance to Sri Lanka since June 2022;

14 (5) commends the International Monetary Fund
15 for calling for structural reforms to address corrup-
16 tion vulnerabilities that hamper Sri Lanka's long-
17 term potential growth;

18 (6) commends the Government of India for pro-
19 viding more than \$3,500,000,000 in lines of credit
20 to the Government of Sri Lanka for food, medicine,
21 and fuel;

22 (7) commends the Government of Japan and
23 the Government of Australia for providing urgent
24 medicine, food, and health care assistance for the
25 Sri Lankan people;

1 (8) calls on the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
2 nations to mobilize additional humanitarian assist-
3 ance, provide desperately needed fuel, and offer eco-
4 nomic support and advice to the Government of Sri
5 Lanka;

6 (9) urges the United Nations Human Rights
7 Council and the Government of Sri Lanka to imple-
8 ment the recommendations detailed in the United
9 Nations High Commissioner for Human Right's re-
10 port that was published on February 25, 2022; and

11 (10) calls on the United National Human
12 Rights Council to extend and reinforce the Office of
13 the High Commissioner for Human Rights' mandate
14 from HRC 46/1 (2021) for an additional 2 years
15 and to fully resource the Sri Lanka Accountability
16 Project.