



Ministry
of Defence

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
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THE RT HON BARONESS GOLDIE DL
MINISTER OF STATE IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS

MSU/4/8/2/3/ap

25 March 2021

Dear Lord Naseby,

During Committee stage of the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill on the 9 March, you asked how the UK Government will keep international bodies informed about the Bill, and also about Sri Lanka and an apparent lack of evidence in relation to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in respect of the case you referenced.

It is the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's role to ensure that the UK Government's international position in relation to its policies are promulgated where necessary. As you will be aware, this is done through the British High Commissions and Ambassadors around the world.

With regard to your separate observation regarding Sri Lanka, you will be aware from the FCDO Minister for South Asia's response to your recent Written Parliamentary Question on the subject that the UK has not received any requests from the UN Human Rights Council for the evidence you describe.

The UK Government's position continues to be that the despatches written by Lieutenant Colonel Gash between 1 January and 18 May 2009 reported on isolated information taken from a number of different sources at particular moments in time, without offering any independent verification of this information. As such, they cannot be considered an evidenced-based assessment of the situation during the civil war.

Subsequent UN reports following the end of the conflict, including the 2011 Panel of Experts report and the 2015 OHCHR Investigation on Sri Lanka (OISL) considered a range of information from the same period, drawing on a broader range of evidence. The OISL stated that "there is no doubt that thousands, and likely tens of thousands, lost their lives, indicating the widespread scale of the attacks".

The Rt Hon The Lord Naseby PC
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The OISL concluded that there were reasonable grounds to believe that gross violations of international human rights law, serious violations of international law, and international crimes were committed by all parties. The UK Government and the Core Group on Sri Lanka have consistently called on the Government of Sri Lanka to fully investigate all allegations to establish truth and deliver justice and accountability. We welcomed the detailed and comprehensive report issued by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on 27 January, and will continue to engage with the Government of Sri Lanka on these important matters.

In consideration of the above, the UK government has no plans to provide the UN Human Rights Council with copies of the despatches written by Lieutenant Colonel Gash.

I am placing a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

*Yours sincerely,
Annabel Su-Goldie*

BARONESS GOLDIE DL