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Alleged War Criminal as an Advisor to UN Secretary General?

The Australasian Federation of Tamil Associations (AFTA), the umbrella body of the peak Tamil associations in Australia and New Zealand, is appalled by the news that Major General Shavendra Silva, Sri Lanka's deputy ambassador to the UN, will be part of a group advising Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. He is one of many military men given top diplomatic posts by Sri Lanka essentially to offer them Diplomatic Immunity.

Maj. Gen Silva is the subject of a lawsuit in the US accusing him of war crimes. This private lawsuit is pending against him in the US, filed on behalf of two Tamils who say his actions killed their family members and that he was a party to war crimes including the intentional shelling of civilians. Human rights campaigners have linked him to the shooting of Tamil Tiger leaders trying to surrender. Maj. Gen Silva initially proclaimed that he will defend any war crime charges against him in any courts but is now trying to evade the charges by hiding behind Diplomatic Immunity. The US court is yet to decide whether it has jurisdiction over him or cannot prosecute him in a US court as long as he is functioning as a diplomat in the US soil.

According to BBC, a Sri Lankan newspaper journalist told the BBC that he and other reporters were telephoned by Maj. Gen Silva, who informed them of his appointment to a Special Advisory Group on Peacekeeping Operations set up by the UN Secretary General. Maj. Gen Silva says he will represent Asian countries on this body, advising Ban Ki-Moon on issues including payments to nations for their peacekeeping troops. Most of the 114 Sri Lankan UN Peace Keeping soldiers deported back to Sri Lanka from Haiti in 2007 for sexual abuse and rape in Haiti have not yet been subjected to investigation and punishment.

AFTA considers UN Secretary General accepting an alleged war Criminal, as a member of a group advising him on UN peace keeping matters, is making a mockery of all the UN stated principles and International Norms and Laws. AFTA considers this move by the Sri Lankan authorities as another attempt to hide Maj. Gen Silva deeper in the Diplomatic Immunity closet along with Dr. Palitha Kohonna, another alleged war criminal as their permanent representative to the UN. Both these officials were allegedly involved in a joint enterprise to extra-judicially kill 3 LTTE *hors de combat* who surrendered by waving a white flag to the Sri Lankan Army after having been given assurances for their safety. AFTA understands that its request to the Australian Federal Minister for Justice to investigate Dr. Kohonna as an Australian citizen allegedly involved in committing war crimes in another country is being considered seriously at the time of this release.

AFTA appeals to the UN Secretary General to uphold the UN values and norms by not accepting his nomination. AFTA appeals to the leaders of the Asian countries not to let an alleged War Criminal to represent them in SG's advisory group on UN Peace Keeping Operations. AFTA appeals to the Australian and New Zealand governments to instruct their Permanent representatives to the UN to raise their concerns in this matter with the UN Secretary General.

AFTA appeals to the media to initiate a campaign to prevent a bad precedent being set in the UN System.

AFTA Member Associations:

Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Darwin, Melbourne, Sydney, Auckland and Wellington