



2018.04.04.

His Excellency Maithripala Sirisena  
President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka  
President's Office  
Colombo 01

Your Excellency,

**Re: Briefing Concerning News Reports on the Vetting by the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka of Military Personnel to be Deployed for Peacekeeping Operations**

This is with reference to the news reported in the newspapers 'The Island' and 'Mawbima' respectively on 26th and 28th of March, concerning the deployment of Sri Lankan Military Personnel to Lebanon for Peacekeeping Operations.

The said news has been reported based on military sources as follows:

The Island:

- The Human Rights Commission has delayed the vetting of 101 Army personnel
- It is only after 49 Army personnel had been deployed to Lebanon, the United Nations instructed that the said personnel should be vetted by the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka.
- A group of 42 Army personnel has been deployed to Lebanon upon the approval of the United Nations for Peacekeeping Operations.

Mawbima:

- The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka has not granted approval even though the United Nations has granted approval for the same.
- The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka has not yet given its approval to the deployment of the said group of army personnel, as a result of which these officers have undergone severe hardship.

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka is deeply concerned and has paid attention to these erroneous news reports. The Army has taken steps to issue a public statement after the above mentioned erroneous news were published but we observe that no attempt has been made to correct the errors in the said news reports.

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka refrained from issuing a public statement in the first instance to correct the said erroneous news reports, as we were of the opinion that it would not be prudent to engage in a dispute with the Army in the public domain.

The Human Rights Commission strongly believes that it is our responsibility to convey true and accurate information about the vetting process to H.E. the President, who is the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, as no corrections have been made thus far by the Sri Lankan Army on the said erroneous reports. Thus, we hereby present the position of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka concerning the vetting process for the deployment of military personnel as part of UN peacekeeping operations. Corrections of the erroneous reports are as follows:

01. Pursuant to the agreement between the Government of Sri Lanka and the United Nations at the meeting held on 15.06.2016 with the Secretary to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Secretary to the Ministry of Defence, Commander of the Sri Lanka Army, Deputy Inspector General Gamini Navaratne, the need of human rights vetting of military personnel to be deployed to peacekeeping operations by the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka was raised, and the consent of the Human Rights Commission to conduct such vetting process was conveyed on 28.06.2016. (Annexures 01 and 02)
02. The Commission's consent to engage in vetting was conveyed to HE the President in writing on 07.09.2016 (Annexure 03). The Sri Lanka Army submitted documents pertaining to 200 military personnel to the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka on 02.02.2017 for vetting. While the vetting process was on-going, the Sri Lanka Army informed the Commission that the United Nations had already conducted the vetting of said personnel prior to the completion of the vetting by the Commission, and hence there was no need for the Commission to proceed with the vetting (Annexure 04). Amidst the confusion that arose, the Commission suspended the vetting process through a written notice (Annexure 05). However, the vetting process was again commenced after a discussion with Hon. Ravi Karunanayake, Minister of Home Affairs, Secretary to the Ministry of Defence, Secretary to the Ministry of Law and Order, Commanders of the Tri-Forces and the Inspector General of Police on 24.07.2017 (Annexure 06).
03. Thereafter, the applications of 204 military personnel who were to be deployed for the peacekeeping operations in Lebanon were submitted to the Commission with a letter dated 21.12.2017 (Annexure 07). However, prior to finalizing of the vetting, the Commission came to know through a media statement broadcasted on 19.02.2018 that a group of 49 soldiers has already been deployed to Lebanon. Thereupon, the Commission inquired from the Sri Lankan Army in writing (Annexure 08) and the Army confirmed that such a deployment has been made (Annexure 09).
04. We were astonished in this regard since the Army was clearly aware that no army personnel could be deployed for UN peacekeeping operations without being subjected

to vetting by the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka. Further, the Commission was not informed that the said group of 49 personnel had to be deployed to Lebanon early. Deploying soldiers who have not undergone the vetting process is a complete violation of the agreement made with the Human Rights Commission.

05. Relevant documents (Annexure 10) required for the vetting of 204 military personnel, inclusive of the said 49 soldiers were due to be submitted to the Commission on 19th March 2018. However, to date we've received only a part of these documents (Annexure 11).

According to the United Nations, Sri Lanka is the first nation to be granted the opportunity to vet military personnel for peacekeeping operations by a national Human Rights Commission. Completing this process with a high degree of credibility is essential to enhance the recognition given to Sri Lankan peacekeeping operation troops. To undertake this process successfully, we need the absolute and good-faith co-operation of the tri-Forces and the Police which are the institutions deploying personnel for peacekeeping operations.

We hereby respectfully present the aforementioned information on the vetting process undertaken by the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka for the attention of Your Excellency.

Chairperson  
Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka