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AUSTRALIA MUST RAISE HUMAN RIGHTS AT CHOGM

Prime Minister Tony Abbott must raise issues of human rights in Sri Lanka at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM) in Colombo.

As the representative in the Federal Parliament for an electorate which comprises the largest concentration of residents from Tamil backgrounds in Australia, I have strong interest in the plight of Tamils in Sri Lanka and the progress of reconciliation.

The United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, will be submitting a comprehensive report on the state of human rights in Sri Lanka at the 25th session of the Human Rights Council in March 2014. Following her visit to Sri Lanka earlier this year and her observations on the lack of progress in matters including the rule of law, accountability, judicial independence, media freedom and the vulnerability of women and girls, the Commissioner has set this date as a deadline for Sri Lanka to engage in its own credible inquiry into these issues.

For these reasons I am on the record as personally questioning Australia's attendance at CHOGM 2013. I regularly raised my concerns with the previous Foreign Minister, Bob Carr, who gave assurances to me and representatives of my local Tamil community that human rights, accountability and reconciliation since the end of the civil conflict in 2009 would continue to feature prominently in Australia's engagement with the Government of Sri Lanka's representatives both here and abroad.

I have since reiterated my concerns to the new Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, and the Shadow Foreign Minister, Tanya Plibersek. Ms Plibersek has confirmed to me this week that in response to my advocacy, she too raised the importance of human rights dialogue with Minister Bishop prior to her departure for CHOGM.

I support the following motion which will be moved in the Senate today, which reflects amendments proposed by Ms Plibersek in response to concerns raised by myself and some of my parliamentary colleagues.

I believe Australia must do everything in its power to uphold the Commonwealth values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law at this forum in the interests of all citizens of Sri Lanka.

14 NOVEMBER 2013

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ATTACHMENT

Motion scheduled to be moved in the Australian Senate on 14 November
2013

The Senate notes:

The UN General Assembly Human Rights Council Resolution encouraging the Sri Lankan Government to conduct an independent investigation into allegations of violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, as applicable.

The Senate calls on Prime Minister Abbott:

To raise the matter of an independent investigation into allegations of violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law with the President of Sri Lanka at the 2013 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Colombo.

