



CHRI Commonwealth
Human Rights
Initiative



01 October 2012

To: Richard Uku

Spokesperson/Director of Communication and Public Affairs

Commonwealth Secretariat

Dear Mr. Uku

Open Letter

Re- Spokesperson's Statement on CHOGM 2013

We write in response to the Commonwealth Secretariat's statement issued on 24 September 2012 in response to the joint letter by *Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)*, *CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation*, *Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative*, *Human Rights Law Centre (Australia)*, *Human Rights Watch*, *Sri Lanka Campaign for Peace & Justice* and *United Nations Association of the UK*, dated 21 September 2012. The statement states that an assertion and a suggestion in the joint letter were erroneous.

This appears to refer to a part of the joint letter that says: "It has come to our attention through the media that you have called for Canada to forego its human rights related objections and fully participate in the CHOGM 2013 in Sri Lanka – where you reportedly saw no deficit in the spirit of democracy. If true, such a call to drop human rights concerns is unprecedented in Commonwealth history."

Our concern arose from a news report filed by *Agence France Presse* on 12 September 2012 about the Secretary-General's response at a press conference in Sri Lanka.¹ A similar report was also filed by the Press Trust of India and carried by 'The Economic Times' on 13 September 2012.²

Quotes carried by established national news outlets in Sri Lanka: 'Daily Mirror', 'Sunday Observer' and 'The Island' on 14, 15 and 12 September 2012 respectively also reported that the Secretary-General stated that he did not think there is a deficit in the spirit of democracy in Sri Lanka.³

It is very clear from our caveats "It has come to our attention through the media" and "if true" that the joint letter was not making assertions but was voicing deep concerns posited on media reports being correct.

We thank you for your prompt clarification and look forward to continue engaging with the Secretariat to further the realisation of human rights across the Commonwealth.

Sincerely

Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA); CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation; Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative; Human Rights Law Centre (Australia); Sri Lanka Campaign for Peace & Justice; and United Nations Association of the UK

¹ <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jAihWk5W9aCP97CIZHYFHysQB7Gg?docId=CNG.3feb68a250c6943b73f2bfa3fecfa3cf.8710>

² http://articles.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/2012-09-13/news/33817198_1_chogm-boycott-tamil-community

³ <http://www.dailymirror.lk/news/21877-no-deficit-of-democracy-in-sl-sharma.html>

<http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2012/09/16/new21.asp>

http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=61397