

'Sri Lanka has framework to curtail human rights violations'

A US human rights official has said that although Sri Lanka has the 'necessary institutional framework in place' to deal with the widely-criticised human rights violations, it "needs to empower its institutions" so that they can be effective.

"Sri Lanka has the necessary institutional framework in place, but it needs to empower its institutions to carry out their work effectively. Human rights protection needs to be applied in fact, not just in law," Erica Barks-Ruggles, the US deputy assistant secretary for democracy, human rights and labour, was quoted as saying in a statement Saturday.

Barks-Ruggles, who visited Sri Lanka May 22-24 as part of the US government's regular consultations, met government officials as well as political and civil society leaders.

Her visit came after Sri Lanka failed to retain its UN Human Rights Council seat during a vote in New York.

Emphasising the importance of continuing the dialogue between the US and Sri Lanka, she also 'commended' recent efforts to address some concerns of the US and other countries on human rights related issues.

While welcoming the recent release of former child soldiers by the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Puligal (TMVP), a breakaway faction of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Barks-Ruggles has "urged the government and others working on this problem to maintain this momentum and ensure that all remaining child soldiers are released in the shortest possible time".

Barks-Ruggles noted that 'there are other areas where further progress is needed such as in combating the problem of abductions and disappearances', a US embassy statement said.

"She saluted the civic courage demonstrated by the independent voices in Sri Lanka's media, some of whom have paid too a high price for speaking out," it added.

Barks-Ruggles is a diplomat with extensive experience in policy planning in the US State Department and the White House National Security Council. From 2001 to 2004, she served in the US Embassy in Oslo, where her portfolio included peace negotiations in Sri Lanka and Sudan.

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