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# Statement

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For immediate release

## STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA

Prime Minister Stephen Harper today made the following announcement:

“When Sri Lanka was selected to host the 2013 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Canada was hopeful that the Sri Lankan government would seize the opportunity to improve human rights conditions and take steps towards reconciliation and accountability. Unfortunately, this has not been the case.

“Canada is deeply concerned about the situation in Sri Lanka. The absence of accountability for the serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian standards during and after the civil war is unacceptable.

“Canada noted with concern the impeachment of the Sri Lankan Chief Justice earlier this year, and we remain disturbed by ongoing reports of intimidation and incarceration of political leaders and journalists, harassment of minorities, reported disappearances, and allegations of extra judicial killings.

“Canada believes that if the Commonwealth is to remain relevant it must stand in defence of the basic principles of freedom, democracy, and respect for human dignity, which are the very foundation upon which the Commonwealth was built.

“It is clear that the Sri Lankan government has failed to uphold the Commonwealth’s core values, which are cherished by Canadians. As such, as the Prime Minister of Canada, I will not attend the 2013 CHOGM in Colombo, Sri Lanka. This is a decision that I do not take lightly.

“Canada will continue to monitor events in Sri Lanka and urge the government to implement fully the recommendations of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission, promote respect for human rights and the rule of law, and undertake an independent investigation into alleged violations of the human rights of thousands of civilians at the end of the conflict.

“Canada will continue to work with our partners and through the United Nations to draw attention to the situation in Sri Lanka. I have also asked the Minister of Foreign

Affairs to review Canada's financial contributions to Commonwealth programs and the Commonwealth Secretariat.

The Honourable Deepak Obhrai, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and for International Human Rights, will represent Canada at the meeting in Colombo.

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