

The Right Honourable Joe Clark
Secretary of State - External Affairs
Ottawa, Canada
K1A - 0G2

Sir:

We, the Sri Lankans for Human Rights and the Tamil Resource Centre wish to bring the following facts about the current events occurring in Sri Lanka for your consideration.

Sri Lanka, once described as the "Pearl of the Indian Ocean " is just 18 miles south of India, a tiny island of 17 million people. Once a peaceful country is now devastated by the the national conflict. The situation in Sri Lanka is not less than equal to the situation in Lebanon.

The recent conflict between the LTTE (the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, a major militant group fighting for a separate state in Sri Lanka) and the Sri Lankan government has impelled us to bring human rights violations to your attention.

Amnesty International has listed Sri Lanka alongside South Africa and other countries as frequent violator of Human Rights.

Sri Lanka gained it's independence from the British in 1948. Since independence, the Tamil-speaking people have been continuously discriminated by the Sri Lankan government, starting in 1958 and followed by 1964, '68, '77, '81 and '83 saw major race-pogroms in Sri Lanka in which many Tamil-speaking people were victimised, and sent to the north and east part of Sri Lanka, which is the birthplace of many Sri Lankan Tamils.

In 1947, the government of D.S. Senanayake, took away the citizenship of one million plantation workers, who were the descendants of Indian Tamils, who were brought by colonial rulers, to work in the tea and coffee estates in the central part of Sri Lanka. Most of them have been sent back to India where they have no relations or friends, after toiling over a hundred years to enrich the Sri Lankan plantation industry. Still there remains a 150,000 people without any citizenship in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan government has decided to repatriate them as soon as possible. Very soon, the fate of these people will be equivalent to the Vietnamese boat people.

It will take volumes and volumes of reports if this letter tries to show how the Sri Lankan Tamils have been discriminated against in Sri Lanka. To make a long story short, we summarize the following as some of the major concerns of Tamil-speaking people:

- * **Citizenship of the Tamil plantation workers**
- * **Colonisation of Sinhalese in the Tamil traditional homelands.**
- * **Language discrimination (Sinhalese is the only official language in Sri Lanka)**
- * **Education and Employment opportunities.**

It is not just these discriminations but the Sri Lankan government's lack of enthusiasm, and the deliberate intention of keeping the Tamils away from the democratic political process, have frustrated the Tamil people and shunted them away from the democratic political process.

It is a tragedy that the Tamil-speaking peoples' struggle for their political rights has lead to a situation where noone involved in this conflict pays any consideration to the basic human rights of the people. Thousands of innocent people have been killed by the Sri Lankan armed forces and by government-supported hooligans during the past ten years. Many innocent youths have been arrested and confined in many army camps without any trial for many years. The emergency regulations and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) gives authority to the armed forces to arrest anyone without warrant and keep them in custody without any trial for eighteen(18) months. Many innocent youths have been kept in custody for more than 18 months without any trial. The PTA gives the authority to dispose of civilians killed by the armed forces without a magistrate's inquest. Thousands of innocent people have been disappeared in the prisons during the past ten years. All these facts have been documented by many international organisations including Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists.

The liberation Movements which were originally formed with the genuine intent to win political rights of the Tamil-speaking people also have contributed to the violations of human rights in the North and East of Sri Lanka where the majority of the Tamil-speaking people live.

Hundreds of innocent people have been arrested, tortured and killed by these militant groups because they were suspected as informers to the government or the supporters of rival groups. Many innocent Sinhalese and Muslims have been killed by these groups as retaliation for the security forces' military operations.

India, the biggest neighbour of Sri Lanka forced the Sri Lankan government to sign the Indo-Lanka peace accord in 1987. The Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) came to Sri Lanka to implement the accord and remained on Sri Lankan soil for more than two and a half years. The sufferings the Tamil people endured by the IPKF's hand is not less than that endured at the hands of Sri Lankan government. When the IPKF left Sri Lanka, in March 1990, there was an illusion in people's minds that peace will remain in this country thereafter, even though no political settlement was in sight in the near future.

On June 19, the peace between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government was broken and the Tamils are now a disillusioned people facing death and starvation at any time. Again, the Sri Lankan government, has destroyed any chances of peace by deliberately delaying to initiate the political process to settle the national conflict.

Since June 19, we have confirmed reports on the following human rights violations in Sri Lanka. Sir, we bring these facts to your attention in the hope of you expressing your concern about human rights violations committed by the government forces to your counterpart in Sri Lanka.

1. **Aerial bombardment and shelling of civilian targets by the Sri Lankan armed forces. Many people have died and been injured by these attacks.**
2. **The use of napalm bombs by the armed forces on civilian targets. Many schools and buildings in the north and east of Sri Lanka have been destroyed by napalm bombs.**
3. **More than two thousand Tamils have been arrested in the capital, Colombo. We have reasonable fear that these innocent people could be used as human shields as used by the state forces before. Some of them have already been killed.**
4. **More than two hundred thousand people have moved into makeshift refugee camps in the north and east of Sri Lanka. Mainly in Amparai, Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Mannar and Jaffna. No arrangements have been made for their food, clothing, medicare and basic needs.**

The Sri Lankan government has accused the LTTE of killing approximately 100 police officers who were captured or surrendered. This allegation was denied by the LTTE. If this incident is true, it is a total violation of the Geneva Convention regarding the treatment of prisoners of war. There are unconfirmed reports that the LTTE has confined many Tamils for various reasons. Their future remains uncertain.

The Tamil Resource Centre and Sri Lankans for Human Rights condemn all these senseless human rights violations.

We request :

All parties engaged in violence to immediately negotiate the end of this violence.

All parties to stop killing civilians of all communities, for their narrow ambitions.

All parties to ensure basic human rights in all parts of Sri Lanka.

The Government of Sri Lanka to abandon their militaristic approach to the national conflict.

Appeal to the government of Canada to use their good relationship with the government of Sri Lanka to request them to pursue a political solution to the national conflict.

Thanking you in advance for your concern:

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**& The Tamil Resource Centre
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cc:

**All Members of Parliament
Human Rights Organisations In Canada**