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Media Release

27, Jan. 2011

Australian Tamils Request Australia not to Accept Retired Navy Commander of Sri Lanka as its Future High Commissioner

The Australasian Federation of Tamil Associations (AFTA), the umbrella body of the peak Tamil associations in the States and Territories of Australia and New Zealand, is highly concerned about the news that a former Sri Lankan Navy Chief, Admiral Thisara S G Samarasinghe, has reportedly been nominated to fill the vacant position of High Commissioner to Australia.

President Maintha Rajapaksa the Commander in Chief of the armed forces, commanders of the 3 armed forces and several other area commanders have been alleged to have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity due to their involvement in giving orders to bomb and shell civilian areas including the use of cluster bombs and chemical weapons.

United Nations, NGOs and human rights organisations such as Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International (AI), International Crisis Group (ICG) and many in the International Community including Britain, France, Germany and Canada have asked for an Independent International Investigation (III) into these alleged war crimes. UN Secretary General has appointed a 3 member panel of experts to advise him on the accountability process that has to be carried out regarding these alleged war crimes committed in Sri Lanka by both sides to the conflict during the last phase of the armed conflict and Sri Lanka is not cooperating with this commission.

The fact that the final war in the East and the North of Sri Lanka was fought without allowing Independent Media, the only evidence available is from civilian eyewitnesses. The lack of witness protection system in Sri Lanka has resulted in witnesses coming forward in front of the Sri Lankan President appointed "Leason Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC)" to give evidence are intimidated by being photographed by plain clothed security forces personnel. LLRC is not an alternative to an III as Amnesty International, HRW and ICG have already rejected the invitation by the LLRC to appear before it, saying that LLRC fails to meet basic international standards for independent and impartial inquiries.

After the end of the war, Sri Lanka is trying to replace its Diplomatic Corps with armed service personnel with the aim of not only hiding these war criminals under diplomatic immunity and rewarding them for the atrocities they have committed against innocent Tamil civilians the way President Rajapaksa's administration wanted and also to curtail the freedom of expression of the Tamil Diaspora, by extending the highhanded tactics of intimidation and illegal surveillance carried out in Sri Lanka to silence the Tamil Community there, to the countries to which they are posted.

Admiral Thisara S.G. Samarasinghe who was Director General Naval Operations in the head quarters was sent as Commander of the Eastern Naval Area during Eastern operations in 2007 and later as Commander of the Northern Naval Area during Northern offensive in 2008, possibly for a special task. Therefore, there is no doubt that any violations of International law governing war time operations committed during the final war in both the Eastern and the Northern theatres by the Sri Lankan Navy were committed under Admiral Samarasinghe's command. Although there are no media reports available, as independent media were not permitted into these areas, there are Australians who have witnessed these violations and people amongst the recent arrivals to Australia from the northern theatre of operations who have gone through horrific experiences are in Australia now to bear witness to these. If the news that Admiral Samarasinghe has been nominated as the new High Commissioner to Australia is true, it is not acceptable by any standards, for the Australian government to accept a person like him with a cloud of alleged war crimes hanging over his head.

AFTA appeals to the Australian government, particularly to our Foreign Minister Hon. Kevin Rudd MP, not to accept his nomination until and unless he is cleared of any alleged war crimes committed by the Navy in the region of war under his command, by an III.

AFTA appeals to the media in Australia and New Zealand to follow this matter up and help the Tamil community in Australia and New Zealand to live without the same fear of intimidation our brotherens in Sri Lanka are subjected to.