

Press Conference on Tuesday, 15th January 2008 2.00pm to 5.00pm
at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, 45-51 Buckingham Gate London SW1E 6AF

- BLOOD MONEY FOR THE SRI LANKAN GOVERNMENT

British Tamils Forum (BTF) has organized a campaign by Tamils in the UK to boycott travel by Sri Lankan airlines flights to Colombo and other destinations. BTF is an umbrella organization representing a confederation of several Tamil organisations in the UK. There are around 300,000 Tamils from Sri Lanka living in the UK and it is estimated that some 30,000 of them travel each year to Colombo to visit their relatives. It is reckoned that Sri Lankan airlines earns about £12million a year in foreign currency revenue from Tamils traveling from London and this adds to the war chest of the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL).

Sri Lanka is bathed in the blood of innocent Tamils. It is a 25 year old military war waged by the Sinhala nation of Sri Lanka to gain supremacy over the Tamils who comprise a separate historical nation. 70,000 Tamils have been killed in this unconscionable war without witness and 1.0 million ruthlessly driven away from their homes into internal exile. A further 1.0 million Tamils have sought refuge in foreign countries. The Sri Lankan government has abandoned all pretence of observing a cease fire while resorting to an escalating war on the Tamils corralled into an ever tightening military cordon in their traditional homeland.

Sri Lankan airline is the National carrier of Sri Lanka and the revenue in foreign exchange that it earns is available through the Central Bank of Ceylon for the acquisition of sophisticated military assets and war material for the prosecution of an unreported war in Sri Lanka, which the Sri Lankan government has contrived to cloak under the fiction of terrorism. It is state terrorism masquerading as a war on terrorism. The Tamil Diaspora in the UK have decided that they cannot continue to contribute, however indirectly, to the blood money earned by the government of Sri Lanka through the international operations of Sri Lankan airlines.

The Sri Lankan government spends as much as a £1,000 million a year on the war effort to subdue the Tamils. It has boasted that with its army of nearly 200,000 personnel it has more soldiers than the present British army. This small island comprising 20 million people has been governed by a ruthless Sinhala Buddhist chauvinistic government which treats the Tamils as usurpers and second class citizens.

The Sri Lankan government has unilaterally scrapped the Cease Fire Agreement from 16th January 2008, which was monitored by the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission (SLMM) and has sent the Nordic Monitors home. This precipitous action by the government has jettisoned any prospect for a peaceful political settlement. The UN, the International NGOs and anyone who has worked in the humanitarian field in Sri Lanka, have all protested vehemently about the torture, kidnapping, indiscriminate aerial bombardment of the civilian population and the killing of 42 NGO workers by the government forces and their paramilitaries. Sri Lanka was ranked third worldwide in the number of journalists killed with seven journalists murdered in 2007 in the line of duty, only behind Iraq and Somalia. In the last two years two Tamil MPs were assassinated in Colombo, where the finger points to government backed paramilitary elements in order to stifle or eliminate the Tamil leadership. The government has yet to prosecute any one in the armed services for massacres of innocent civilians. We think that the partisan international pressure exerted by Western countries only on the LTTE was a mistake in that it led the GoSL to consider it a carte blanche from the international community to scrap the cease fire agreement and finish off the Tamils in a one-sided war. We feel that a more even handed approach from the international community between the two proponents, including sanctions on the GoSL for human rights abuses, will even now be more conducive to a negotiated peace settlement in Sri Lanka.

We appeal to our fellow Tamils, be they prospective passengers or travel agents, to understand that traveling with Sri Lankan airlines is tantamount to paying the government of Sri Lanka to buy the weaponry with which to kill our own people in their homeland in Sri Lanka. We appreciate that flying with other airlines to Colombo may involve some delay in transit stopovers but it is the blood money to Sri Lanka that we want to stop.

We also extend this appeal to our other British compatriots who travel on holiday to Sri Lanka to think of the deaths and destruction that their money paid will eventually cause among the Tamils of Sri Lanka and to kindly avoid such travel. We have support from our counterpart Tamil organisations in Europe, Canada, USA, Australia and India to make this campaign to boycott Sri Lankan airlines worldwide. We intend to continue with this campaign until the GoSL stops all human rights abuses against the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

Say No to blood money earned by Sri Lankan airlines for the Government of Sri Lanka.

British Tamils Forum
165 The Broadway
Wimbledon
SW191NE
Phone: 020 8544 8016
Fax: 020 8544 8017
e mail: admin@tamilsforum.com