



CANADIAN TAMIL CONGRESS ■ CONGRÈS TAMOUL CANADIEN

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Tamil Canadians Urge for Even-handed Approach to Sri Lanka conflict

The Tamil Canadian community is deeply saddened by the recent decision of the Canadian government to list the World Tamil Movement (WTM) as a terrorist entity, without giving any regard to the full implications of this action and a clear understanding of the conflict in Sri Lanka.

When announcing the listing of the WTM, the Minister of Public Safety stated that in the first six weeks of 2008, there were 100 civilian deaths in Sri Lanka and that 270 people have been injured, leaving a false impression among the Canadian public that the LTTE was responsible for these civilian casualties. However, it is important to clarify that the vast majority of these deaths have been the result of Sri Lankan Armed Forces operations, including disappearances, and the aerial bombardment of Tamil villages in the North and East of Sri Lanka.

In addition, this is the first domestic Canadian organization that has been proscribed under the ATA act, and therefore the Tamil Canadian community feels they are being unfairly targeted and victimized by this action. After the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was added as a terrorist entity in April 2006, members of the Tamil Canadian community felt the blunt impact of stereotyping and discriminatory treatment that is a byproduct of such a listing. Numerous incidents of discrimination at schools, workplaces and the general public were reported immediately. Similarly, the Canadian Tamil Congress is concerned that the listing of the WTM will have a deeper impact on members of the Tamil Canadian community.

This decision also has important international implications. The Canadian government is looking at the situation of Sri Lanka from the wrong lens – terrorism and counter-terrorism, when in fact what is going on in Sri Lanka is an armed conflict. Thus far, the Canadian government has focused on criminalizing the LTTE, and by extension the Tamil-Canadian community, while it has made no statements on the human rights abuses perpetuated by the Sri Lankan government, as identified over the years by many reputable international organizations and Canadian government representatives. Currently, there is no concrete policy on bringing the armed conflict in Sri Lanka to a peaceful resolution that addresses the grievances of the Tamil community.



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"Instead of fulfilling its traditional role as a peacebuilding nation, our present Canadian government's approach to Sri Lanka reinforces the breakdown of peace in Sri Lanka," said David Poopalapillai, National Spokesperson for the Canadian Tamil Congress. "Sri Lanka is notorious as one of the worst human rights perpetrators when it comes to suppression of media freedom, arbitrary arrests and detentions, enforced disappearances, and has failed in its duty and responsibility to protect its citizens from armed conflict."

The Canadian Tamil Congress is deeply concerned about the negative implications of this listing on both the Tamil-Canadian community at home, as well as the Tamil community in Sri Lanka. CTC urges the Canadian government to apply an even-handed approach in the treatment of both parties to the conflict and asks that the Canadian government consider imposing economic and diplomatic sanctions against the Government of Sri Lanka.

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