



# Tamil Information Centre

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Committed to Human Rights and Community Development

## **PRESS STATEMENT**

**Date: 27 July 2008**

### **Sri Lanka: New direction needed to arrest chaos**

The Sri Lankan government continues to reject repeated calls by the international community to refrain from seeking a military solution to the Tamil national question and to engage in a political dialogue to resolve the conflict. The TIC urges the government to adopt a violence-reduction strategy that encourages cooperation among the island's embattled communities, rather than continuing to pursue a destructive and divisive military solution in Sri Lanka.

Despite ceasefires agreed between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on several occasions, peace remains elusive. Anger and resentment are widespread that causes and issues that lie at the core of the conflict are not being addressed. Past negotiations have been shallow and conducted without transparency, without civil society involvement and without any accountability to the people of Sri Lanka. What the Sri Lankan government must do now is to adopt a new approach that attempts to break the deadly spiral of violence and addresses the grievances of all communities in Sri Lanka.

Since the government's withdrawal from the Norwegian brokered February 2002 Ceasefire Agreement with the LTTE on 16 January 2008, suspicion has deepened, contributing to an environment of ever-growing distrust. The communiqués and statements issued by both parties on many issues only reflect their deep distrust, polarised opinions and high level of divergence in positions on war and peace. Meanwhile, human rights violations are continuing to be perpetrated with impunity and increasing ferocity by all sides involved in the conflict.

To make matters worse, not a single development project has been implemented in the regions controlled by the government in north-east Sri Lanka. In many areas in the north, fighting continues, leading to further loss of life and a deteriorating social environment. There is fear, panic and an inability for civilians to return to a normal life in many parts of the Tamil homeland. In these desperate times, it is critical that all parties do their utmost to improve the security and humanitarian conditions of the people of the island. There is no guarantee that any course of action will arrest Sri Lanka's continuing descent into violence and chaos. We are all aware, however, that a military solution, as currently pursued, is immoral and will not produce a just political solution, as experienced in other parts of the world. It is time to pursue a different course, one that reduces the level of bloodshed and creates new opportunities for cooperation. Without an alternative to war and militarization of the island, both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE are condemned to an endless cycle of violence and armed conflict.

In a press release issued on 22 July 2008, the LTTE states that it has declared a ten-day "unilateral ceasefire" as a "sign of goodwill" for the duration of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) summit scheduled for 26 July-4 August 2008 in Colombo. The statement rules out any peace talks as long as the Sri Lankan army continues its offensive. The Sri Lankan army and senior government officials have rejected the ceasefire offer and have said that military operations will continue.

The TIC urges –

- a) the government of Sri Lanka to view the LTTE's ceasefire offer as positive, and reciprocate it by making a similar announcement giving rise to a real ceasefire leading to an end to the armed conflict and the beginning of confidence building between the parties, peace talks and agreement on substantive issues that lie at the heart of the conflict;
- b) the international community to continue to exert pressure on both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE to end the war immediately and begin talks aimed at a comprehensive settlement to the conflict.
- c) the Sri Lankan civil society groups and organisations to actively continue their efforts to bring the parties to the conflict to the negotiating table, without further delay; and
- d) the community organisations and interest groups based outside Sri Lanka to urgently call upon the Sri Lankan government, the LTTE and the international community to explore all peaceful means possible in order to bring the conflict to an end.

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