



Tamil Information Centre

தமிழ் தகவல் நடுவம்

Committed to Human Rights and Community Development

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Tamil Parties Recognize Need for Unity and Consensus for Durable Solution

After a three-day conference in Switzerland, the political parties of the Tamil speaking peoples of Sri Lanka, recognizing the need for unity and consensus, committed themselves to the engagement by all segments of society towards a just and durable political solution in the island through a dignified, respectful and peaceful process. The parties also agreed to continue the discussions.

The conference from 20 to 22 November 2009, titled "*The role of the elected representatives of Sri Lanka's Tamil and Muslim population in a process of national reconciliation, reconstruction and reform*" was jointly organized by the Tamil Information Centre (TIC), the International Working Group on Sri Lanka (IWG), the Initiative on Conflict Prevention through Quiet Diplomacy (ICPQD) at the University of Essex. It was hosted by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. The following Tamil parties were represented at the conference: All Ceylon Muslim Congress, All Ceylon Tamil Congress, Ceylon Workers Congress, Democratic Peoples Front, Eelam People's Democratic Party, Eelam People's Revolutionary Front, Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students, Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi, Pathmanabha Eelam Peoples', Revolutionary Liberation Front, People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam, Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation, Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal, Tamil National Alliance, Tamil United Liberation Front and Up-Country Peoples Front.

The conference was arranged in a climate of extreme unease in Sri Lanka and abroad in relation to the future of the Tamil speaking peoples in the island. Five months have elapsed since the Sri Lanka government announced the military defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), but despite the assurances of the government, little visible progress has been made towards addressing minority rights and grievances. Some suspect that there is no serious intention to implement meaningful reforms in the long-term and fear further erosion of minority rights. The most egregious sign of a lack of progress is the treatment of 300,000 internally displaced Tamil civilians, many of whom continue to be held against their will in miserable inhuman conditions. The political opposition, civil society and journalists who call for the protection of the IDPS or minority rights are portrayed as enemies of the state and have been silenced through assassination, violence and imprisonment or forced to flee the country.

Under these circumstances it is essential for the representatives of the Tamil speaking peoples to unite to develop an effective common programme to hold the government accountable for the protection of minorities, and to act as a serious and dependable negotiating partner representing the demands of minorities in the development of meaningful proposals for reform in Sri Lanka.

In this light, the short and long-term aims of the conference were as follows:

- ❑ To provide a safe and facilitated space for dialogue and engagement between the representatives of Sri Lanka's main political parties of the Tamil-speaking peoples;
- ❑ To build on preparatory discussions with and between the parties aimed at bridging divides and identifying common ground on substantive issues;
- ❑ To explore the possibilities for future cooperation towards the development of a common political platform for the representation of Sri Lanka's Tamil speaking peoples within the political framework of pre and post-election Sri Lanka;

- In the long-term, to support Sri Lanka's Tamil speaking political parties to play a meaningful role in a process of national reconciliation and a programme of political, institutional and constitutional reform aimed at addressing their grievances and preventing a return to armed conflict.

The meeting was conducted in a spirit of openness, mutual respect and constructive debate. The representatives expressed their full commitment to unity and to a common forum to seek a just and durable political solution. The participants obtained important clarifications and achieved common understanding. They also pledged commitment to continue their discussions in the interest of achieving full respect for the rights of the Tamil-speaking peoples and to building a peaceful, dynamic and prosperous society.

Among the issues discussed were shared concerns of the long, medium and short-term. These included an in depth discussion on the evolution of an acceptable, inclusive political solution to the conflict. Also discussed were principles for and solutions to urgent matters such as the situation of internally displaced persons, Muslim IDPs, detainees and the disappeared, demilitarisation and the rule of law. Also discussed was the urgent need for the facilitation of voluntary return of all internally displaced persons to their homes and land in conditions of safety and dignity, and to expeditiously provide for their housing and livelihood requirements under competent and independent civilian supervision.

At the end of the conference, the participating political parties issued the following joint statement:

Joint Statement

We, the representatives of the political parties of the Tamil-speaking peoples unanimously:

Affirm the historic meeting enabling an exchange of views, and express a full commitment to a common forum among representatives of all Tamil-speaking peoples;

Recognize 'Tamil-speaking peoples' comprise three distinct peoples: Tamils, Muslims, and Tamils of Indian origin;

Respect the distinct and separate identities, interests and positions of the parties;

Recognize and affirm the need for unity and consensus among the Tamil-speaking peoples while acknowledging differences with regard to some issues and the paths to pursue them;

Commit to the engagement by all segments of society towards a just and durable political solution through a dignified, respectful and peaceful process;

Agree and commit to continuing our dialogue.

Names:

Mr. Veerasingham Anandasangaree, Tamil United Liberation Front
Mr. Periyasamy Chandrasekaran, Up-Country Peoples Front
Mr. Douglas Devananda, Eelam People's Democratic Party
Mr. Abdul Rauff Hakeem, Sri Lanka Muslim Congress
Mr. Mohamed Hizbullah, All Ceylon Muslim Congress
Mr. Mano Ganeshan, Democratic Peoples Front
Mr. Kulasekaram Mahenthiran, Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation
Mr. Sivasubramaniam Nanthakumar, Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students
Mr. Gagendrakumar Ponnambalam, All Ceylon Tamil Congress
Mr. Suresh Premachandran, Eelam People's Revolutionary Front
Mr. R. Sampathan, Tamil National Alliance
Mr. Sivanesathurai Santhirakanthan, Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal
Mr. Mavai S. Senathirajah, Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi
Mr. Dharmalingam Sithadthan, People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam
Mr. Thirunavukarasu Sritharan, Pathmanabha Eelam Peoples' Revolutionary Liberation Front
Mr. Arumugan Thondaman, Ceylon Workers Congress