

OFFICE OF THE INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE FOR THE

Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam

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World Refugee Day: Tamils remember more than 50 years of refugee life

Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam calls to ensure the right to home

As the World marks the World Refugee Day on June 20, The Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam (TGTE) pledges to continue to work for the tens of thousands of Tamil civilians languishing in Sri Lankan military run internment camps and for the welfare of those that have departed the camps but continue to face the likelihood of arbitrary arrest, detention and torture. It also pledges to work towards overcoming the economic and social challenges faced by these Internally displaced Persons (IDP) and stopping the colonization schemes planned by the military to permanently keep these people out of their homes. As a body representing and unifying the Tamils around the world, we will keep alive the memories of Tamil refugee life throughout the past five decades in all our endeavors.

The past fifty years have been marked with a record of refugee life for the Tamils in Sri Lanka. Over these years, Tamils have been the victims of state sponsored ethnic attacks which have caused them to flee to different parts of the world as refugees. In 1958, Sinhalese mobs supported by the Sri Lankan state hunted Tamils in their houses, work places, schools and on the streets. Thousands of Tamil civilians were massacred, burnt alive and Tamil women were gang raped for simply being a Tamil. Ethnic pogroms were instigated by the Governments in 1965, 1977 and 1983 which saw many Tamils flee from their homes for safety.

Refugees leaving in boats sometimes had to face dangerous sea journeys that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Tamils. This tragic death of refugees continues to the present day. Leaving their homes and histories that they had cherished for thousands of years, Tamils have sought refuge around the world for more than fifty years.

Last year, in May 2009, over three hundred thousand persons who fled the conflict zone were held in Government run "internment camps." By restricting humanitarian aid to those held in the camps, the Sri Lankan Government hampered efforts of the UN and other Non-Governmental organizations to provide adequate relief to these displaced civilians.

According to **Ms. Magdalena Sepulveda**, who delivered a statement on May 26, 2009, on behalf of all UN Special Procedures mandate holders: "The Government of Sri Lanka... after three months continues to detain in temporary camps the more than 300,000 men, women and children who escaped fighting. ...We deplore that in the camps some have already died from starvation or malnutrition".

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According to Amnesty International, there are consistent reports of widespread and serious human rights violations facing the displaced people, including enforced disappearance, extrajudicial executions, torture and other ill-treatment, forced recruitment by paramilitary groups and sexual violence. Although the Government claims to have “resettled” about 220,000 people in various parts of the country, these civilians continue to face the likelihood of harassment and ill-treatment due to vast military presence in their surroundings.

“The present crisis for the Tamils of Sri Lanka resonates with oppressed people everywhere” says Professor Elie Wiesel, Nobel peace Prize Winner and survivor of the concentration camps of Nazi Germany. He further states “Their freedom and democratic rights in Sri Lanka are threatened daily. It reminds us of other times in history when a group or race was singled out for persecution and racism.” We believe as history has shown that in such circumstances only an independent state can guarantee their very physical survival.

We, the members of the Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam, stand beside our kith and kin who have been denied their fundamental rights and the right to exercise their political sovereignty in the island of Sri Lanka. The Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam will work for the betterment of these people and for their freedom to live in their traditional homelands. Two members from the Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam are presently in Malaysia to look after the well-being of the group of 61 men, 6 women and 8 children who were discovered by Malaysian marine police in the waters off the coast of the northern state of Penang last month in a damaged fishing trawler. Mr. Mahindan Sivasubramaniam, a member of the TGTE, attended the UNHCR conference in Paris, France on the 16th of June 2010 on behalf of the TGTE. In this conference he observed the fact that thousands of Tamils are still in the camps and that Tamils’ life and security are still not secured in the island of Sri Lanka. In this conference, it was pointed out that Sri Lanka was included in the list of ten countries that saw large-scale internal and external displacement in the year 2009.

On this day the TGTE calls upon the international community to ensure that people who have been dislocated from their traditional habitat be allowed to return to their homes in accordance with the international norms and live there with dignity. In this context we also note the Refugee Day message by the UN High Commissioner, Antonio Guterres, which stated *inter alia* “On this day, World Refugee Day, I ask you to help us help refugees find a place to call home”

“We can be ousted from our homes and lands but we cannot be denied our right to fight for freedom.”

**Committee for Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees
Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam**