



PRESS RELEASE

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USTPAC commemorates Black July and calls for Justice for Tamils in Sri Lanka

United States Tamil Political Action Council pays homage to the 3,000 Tamils killed by state-sponsored anti-Tamil violence in July 1983, and calls for international investigations to seek justice for the 40,000 Tamil deaths in 2009.

Washington, DC: Twenty seven years ago on a sunny July day, the lives of the Tamil people living in the island of Sri Lanka turned upside down without any warning. Under the pretext of retaliating for the deaths of 13 soldiers belonging to the ethnicity of the ruling elite, Sinhalese soldiers and hoodlums were set loose on innocent Tamil civilians living in the south. Tamil homes and businesses were looted and burned. Tamil political prisoners under State custody were butchered. Nearly 3,000 Tamil men, women and children were murdered, many burnt alive. Tens of thousands of Tamil survivors were shipped to their homeland in the NorthEast, having lost all their possessions and livelihood. Western countries shocked by the horror opened their doors to the fleeing Tamils. Thus began a massive exodus of the Tamils from the island.

That was Black July, the July of 1983.

Communal violence against the Tamils by the Sinhala had become a regular occurrence ever since the country of Ceylon attained independence from Britain in 1948. The 1983 violence was not only the worst thus far, but was also condoned by the State. In 1984 Paul Sieghart, the Chairman of the International Commission of Jurists, published his findings on Black July titled: "Sri Lanka: A Mounting Tragedy of Errors." In that report Sieghart stated that Black July was not a spontaneous upsurge of communal hatred among the Sinhala people, but a series of deliberate acts, executed in accordance with a concerted plan, conceived and organized well in advance.

"Unto this day, 'nineteen eighty three' is etched in the heart of every Tamil," said a survivor now living in California, USA, adding, "Twenty-seven years have gone by without justice or compensation, and the peace, dignity and political rights that Tamils have been longing for still prove elusive."

If the 1983 violence was simply condoned by the State, there were no such pretensions when early last year the Sri Lankan government forces bottled up 400,000 civilians in a 40 square miles "no fire zone" and bombarded and shelled them indiscriminately, culminating in the deaths of approximately 40,000 Tamil civilians. While it was the then UN spokesman Gordon Weiss who now places the death toll at 40,000, the International Crisis Group in its report records a number of between 30,000 and 75,000 casualties.

Bowing to pressure by human rights group the United Nations Secretary General has appointed a three member panel to advise him on how best to proceed with the alleged war crimes in Sri Lanka. USTPAC calls on all governments respecting human rights and the rule of law, especially our own United States, to support and strengthen the mechanisms of the UN for an international independent investigation of the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed against the Tamil civilians in Sri Lanka.

Although in sheer numbers the destruction caused by the war in 2009 surpasses 1983 many times, it is 1983 that marks the beginning of the attempted destruction of the identity of Tamils in the island of Sri Lanka, now accelerated by an army of occupation pushing demographic changes to the Tamil homeland.

USTPAC calls on everyone to join us in remembering Black July 1983 and its significance to the Tamils of Sri Lanka, and for everyone to take up “Never Again” as a sacred call to humanity one more time.

For more information, please contact USTPAC at info@ustpac.org or 202-595-3123. www.ustpac.org