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An Appeal to the International Community

A REALISTIC LOOK AT THE SRI LANKAN PROBLEM

This is a Submission to the International Community (IC) setting out the problem in Sri Lanka so that appropriate action can be taken to prevent the disintegration, not only of the Tamil North and East, but the Sinhalese South, indeed the whole country.

The GOSL claims that the whole problem is 'terrorism' by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). In reality, what the Government has been doing is to bomb, kill and destroy the Tamil *people* and their property, in the North and East of Sri Lanka.

Despite a Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) between the previous (UNP¹) government and the LTTE, the newly elected (17 November 2005) President, Mahinda Rajapakse, from the SLFP², backed by anti-Tamil political opportunists in the JVP³ and hardline anti-Tamil ethno-religious chauvinists among the Buddhist monks (JHU⁴), seems determined to take the country to war rather than negotiate with the Tamil 'minority'.

Should hostilities break out again, it will cause massive civilian casualties in the Tamil North and East and extensive destruction of their property, already devastated by an 18-year war and the recent tsunami.

There will also be a serious loss of Sinhalese lives, especially among the rural and urban poor, from whose ranks come the Sinhalese soldiers who will also get killed in this unnecessary war.

The economy of the country, already in crisis because of poor economic management, will not survive because of the massive expenditure on arms which has to be paid for in hard currency, and a slump in tourism and foreign investment which will inevitably occur. Financial bankruptcy and a 'failed State' are real possibilities.

It is only pressure on the GOSL by the IC, especially the crucial aid-donors, that can prevent this disaster.

¹ United National Party – one of the two main Sinhalese Parties.

² Sri Lanka Freedom Party – the other main Sinhalese Party, currently in power.

³ Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna – initially Marxist, now anti-Tamil opportunists

⁴ Jathika Hela Urumaya – a political party of Buddhist monks who have been virulently anti-Tamil

Foreign governments seem to rely entirely on false propaganda by the GOSL and Government-controlled media, in assessing the situation in Sri Lanka. However, they cannot plead ignorance of the *true* situation since all major countries have well-informed Embassies in Colombo. It is inconceivable that they do not know what is going on. I suspect that they do not want to know, and even less, to act as they should. If that is so, it is time the international community was made aware of the truth.

My position

1. I am a Sinhalese from the majority community (74%) and not from of the persecuted Tamil minority (18%) which has, for many years, faced serious problems at the hands of the Sinhalese-dominated GOSL. My only interest is humanitarian, not political.

2. It is of no concern to me as to who runs Sri Lanka as long as it is run without discrimination of a section of the population and the extensive violation of their human rights, including and especially, the right to life. Amnesty International (AI) and other Human Rights groups with international credibility have documented, in a series of publications in the past three decades, the serious violation of human rights to which the Tamil people have been subjected. This has included mass arrests, detention without charge or trial, 'disappearances' of thousands while in Army custody (Sri Lanka had the second highest incidence of involuntary 'disappearances' in the world), murder, torture and rape of Tamil civilians by the Armed Forces, and bombing and shelling of the Tamil North (and recently of the East) by their Government.

3. I totally reject the GOSL canard that the entire problem in Sri Lanka is "terrorism". While such a claim would enable the GOSL to solicit international help to buy weapons from countries with an abundance of military hardware to sell, it will only cause destruction in Sri Lanka and will not settle the ethnic problem.

The ethnic problem, currently destroying Sri Lanka, is a deeply complex one which is outlined below. The bottom line is an attempt by Sinhalese political parties across the entire political spectrum to make multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multicultural Sri Lanka into a Sinhala-Buddhist nation to get the support of the majority Sinhalese (74%) to get into and remain in power. If that is the declared objective (even enshrined in the 1972 and subsequent Constitutions), then there is no alternative to a separate Tamil State, Eelam.

My perception is that the Tamil people have been driven to demand a separate state because of the politics of exclusion, political opportunism and abysmally poor governance by a succession of Sinhalese politicians since Independence in 1948.

4. In addition to a problem with populist politics in the political arena, in the area of administration, the bottom line is a centralisation of (developmental) power in the hands of the majority Sinhalese and a developmental neglect of the periphery which includes the entire area in which the Tamils live (and also the 'deep' Sinhalese South). It is a direct consequence of a British colonial construct (1833) which unified three separate states for colonial administrative convenience. This construct has failed because of poor governance and the failure to build a nation by the Sinhala leadership since Independence. It is too late now to try and build a single nation.

5. The single factor that prevents the GOSL from addressing the problems faced by the Tamils is foreign assistance (financial and military) given to the GOSL to fight its own people, i.e. crush the Tamils. Instead of assisting in the solution of the problem, foreign Governments are now part of it.

6. Many people (Tamils) encouraged by my stance in support of a discriminated people, have stressed that I am related to the Bandaranaiques. I see no virtue in coming from a family which has over the past 50 years destroyed Sri Lanka by political opportunism, ethnic chauvinism and abysmally poor governance which has caused so much suffering to so many. If my involvement has an 'agenda', it is to do what I can to address problems created by members of my family.

The problem

The Sri Lankan problem is deeply complex involving historical, geographical, geopolitical, ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural factors intertwined with local power politics, and increasingly, with Indian domestic problems. It is not possible to address the problem in Sri Lanka without at least a basic understanding of the history of this conflict.

1. Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) was not a single entity. For hundreds of years it consisted of three separate Kingdoms (Nations), a Jaffna (Tamil) Kingdom in the north, a Kandyan (Sinhalese) Kingdom in the centre and a Kotte (Sinhalese) Kingdom in the south. It was the British who, in 1833 (the Colebrooke-Cameron 'reforms'), 'unified' the country for the administrative convenience of the colonial power. It was not only an 'unification' but a centralisation of power, including developmental power, in the Sinhalese South and later, in Sinhalese political hands.

2. This colonial 'experiment' has failed (as it has in Malaya, India, and numerous other former colonial countries). While the failure in Malaya and India has been corrected (with the splitting of Malaya into Malaysia and Singapore (I might add that Singapore is one hundredth the size of Sri Lanka), and India into Pakistan and India), the documented failure in Sri Lanka has not been corrected. It is this that has led to the disastrous civil war which has decimated Sri Lanka in the past two decades and is threatening the future of the country, indeed its very survival.

3. There has been a serious and developmental neglect of the periphery at the hands of a succession of centralised governments in Colombo. This means that for any solution to the problems in Sri Lanka, there must be development of the periphery, in both the Tamil and the Sinhalese areas, from where the Tamil and the Sinhalese militancy arose in the 1970s.

4. In addition to a developmental neglect of the Tamil areas, there has been serious and progressive discrimination of the Tamil minority in the use of their language (Tamil), education, job opportunities and even the right to exist, at the hands of every Sinhalese-dominated Government since Independence 58 years ago. This has been done by every Sinhalese political party for political gain – some 74% of the voters being Sinhalese.

a) Disenfranchisement and decitizenisation of the Plantation Tamils

The Plantation Tamils are not the Sri Lankan Tamils (who have been in the country for 2500 years (probably longer)), but are indentured labour brought by the British to work on

the tea plantations in the 1830s. They have made (and continue to make) a major contribution to the economy of the country.

In 1948, a million Plantation Tamils were disenfranchised and decitizenised by the Government in one of the worst acts of political barbarism the world has known, simply because they had voted for the Opposition.

Over the years, at least half of them have been sent back to India despite having been in Sri Lanka for more than four generations. Although their voting rights have recently been restored, they remain some of the most underprivileged and disadvantaged people in the country, living and working in near slave conditions to keep Sri Lanka on the map.

b) Colonisation schemes

Under the guise of opening agricultural schemes in the Tamil areas, a succession of Sri Lankan Governments has relocated Sinhalese from the South-West to the Tamil areas. This was a deliberate attempt to change the demographic composition of these areas in favour of the Sinhalese.

c) The use of their language

In 1956, SWRD Bandaranaike changed the Official Language of Ceylon (English) to Sinhalese only, to the exclusion of Tamil. Tamils, especially in Government employment, were seriously disadvantaged. Although the Government claims by a play of words (that Sinhalese is the Official Language but Sinhala and Tamil are National Languages), Sinhalese remains the Official Language of Sri Lanka. This is highly discriminatory against a major ethnic group in the country.

d) Education

In 1972 Prime Minister Sirima Bandaranaike (who succeeded her husband, assassinated by a Buddhist monk because he attempted to partially reverse his Sinhala-Only Act), introduced so-called "Standardisation of University Entrance Marks". This required Tamil students to obtain a higher aggregate of marks than their Sinhalese counterparts to get into the University.

This is not only highly discriminatory but violates the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26.1 which states that "*everyone has the right to education, higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit*".

e) Employment

There has been serious and progressive discrimination in employment particularly in the clerical service which has been the forte of the Tamils. Between 1956 and 1970 of some 189, 000 people recruited by the public sector corporations, 99% were Sinhalese. Despite Government claims to the contrary, even today Tamils are seriously discriminated against in employment in the Government sector. Attempts by the GOSL to deny discrimination against the Tamils by pointing to a handful of Tamils who have been appointed to senior positions, is blatantly dishonest.

f) Development

There has been a deliberate neglect of development of the Tamil areas since Independence. This is obvious to anyone who has visited these areas. Here again the GOSL denying this by pointing to two or three factories established 50 years ago is dishonest.

g) The Tsunami

The most blatant example of discrimination against the Tamils was the handling of foreign aid for the post-tsunami relief. The Tamil North and East bore the brunt of the damage from the recent Tsunami. However, less than a quarter, if that, of the relief went to this area. The GOSL threw away a golden opportunity to show the Tamil people that they cared. Indeed, they confirmed the worst fears of the Tamils.

Tamil protests

From 1956 (the introduction of the highly discriminatory change in the Official Language), the elected representatives of the Tamil people have staged Gandhi-style non-violent protests. These have been met by violence unleashed on them by Sinhalese hoodlums sponsored by the GOSL while the Police (95% Sinhalese) and the Army (99% Sinhalese), have done nothing to stop the violence and, in some instances, have assisted the hoodlums.

In an attempt to address the problems faced by the Tamils, a succession of Sinhalese Governments have signed Pacts with the elected Tamil leadership. These have been unilaterally abrogated by the GOSL under pressure from Sinhala chauvinists and extremists who perceive Sri Lanka as a Sinhala-Buddhist nation, and any 'concessions' to the Tamils as a *"sell out of a Sinhala Buddhist nation to the Tamils"*.

Tamil massacres

There has been systematic and progressive violence unleashed by the Sinhala dominated GOSL on the Tamil minority to force them to accept Sri Lanka as a Sinhala-Buddhist nation. It is a blatant attempt to force a political solution by the use of military might by the State.

Some of these attacks have been simply because they voted against the Government. For example, in 1977 when the Tamils in the North and East voted for the establishment of a separate Tamil State, Eelam, there was an extensive massacre of Tamils in the South and East.

In 1983, the Tamil massacre was such that it raised the possibility of genocide. Some 3,000 Tamil civilians in Colombo and the Sinhala South, were killed and their homes and businesses destroyed for no reason other than that they were Tamils. There is extensive evidence that this was pre-planned by the GOSL. The intention was not only to kill the Tamils but to destroy their economic place in Colombo and the South. Two of the ring leaders involved in this blot on Sri Lankan history were the virulently anti-Tamil Minister of Industries, Cyril Matthew, and a Buddhist monk, Elle Gunawansa, from the extremist section of the Buddhist clergy.

Genocide is defined by the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide as an act committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. The Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) is a signatory to this international Convention. According to the definition in this Convention, what happened in Sri Lanka in 1883 (and subsequently), is genocide.

There have been regular massacres of Tamil civilians in 1956, 1958, 1977, 1981 and 1983. I have not included the extensive killing of Tamils in the North and East since 1983 which run into tens of thousands.

The Tamil Militants

With peaceful protests by their elective representatives achieving nothing, in the mid 1970s, Tamil youths took up arms to force the GOSL to address the problems faced by their people, and to establish a separate Tamil state in the North and East as was overwhelmingly voted for in the 1977 elections. Essentially this was, and still is, a liberation struggle to free the Tamil people from Sinhalese domination.

There were several Tamil militant groups which have now come down to one group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who have been the only group prepared to challenge the Sinhala Government.

The Sri Lankan Armed Forces

The Sri Lankan Armed Forces (99% Sinhalese) were moved into Jaffna in the Tamil North in 1961 by Prime Minister Sirima Bandaranaike to 'deal with' a civil disobedience campaign mounted by the Tamils to bring the administration in the Tamil areas to a standstill. Here again is a non-violent protest crushed by the military might of the State Forces.

Since then there has been a marked increase in the Armed Forces in the North. They have behaved like an Army of Occupation in Jaffna. There were some 40,000 troops when Mahinda Rajapakse was elected President six months ago. Today the numbers have been increased to 60,000 which give an indication of his agenda, whatever his rhetoric may be.

The Army behave like an Army of Occupation. They not only continue to terrorise the people in the North and the East but occupy the most productive agricultural lands in the Jaffna Peninsula which have been declared by them to be High Security Zones (HSZ) from which civilians are barred. They also harass and regularly confiscate part of the catch from local fishermen. Some 35 schools in the HSZ are not accessible to civilians, creating substantial problems in education.

The Armed Forces have prevented the return to normality of the area despite the terms of the Ceasefire Agreement which brought an end to the fighting between the GOSL and the LTTE in December 2001. Whatever the agenda of the Sri Lankan Government, the Armed Forces seem to have their own agenda which has nothing to do with what their Government wants to do, or *claims* to want to do..

Terrorism

In any analysis of terrorism, it is important to distinguish between two completely different types of violence.

1. Violence unleashed (usually on the State) in the pursuance of a political objective – often when non-violent protests have failed or have been subjected to State or State sponsored violence. This is not ‘terrorism’, but a ‘liberation struggle’ of an oppressed people on the oppressor (the State).
2. Violence unleashed by anyone (usually on civilians) to instil terror.
A variant is violence unleashed by the State on its people (or some of its people) to terrorise them to into accepting a political solution which they find unacceptable.

Liberation struggles

As I have said, the GOSL has portrayed the Sri Lankan problem as “nothing but terrorism”. The perception of “terrorism” is often in the eye of the beholder. If the beholder (an individual, population or country) supports the goals of the rebels, which, in the case of Sri Lanka are the Tamil people trying to free themselves from a repressive regime, then the rebels are “freedom fighters”. If they do not support the goals of the rebels, then they are branded as “terrorists”.

Any government’s condemnation of terror is credible only if it shows itself to be responsive to reasonable, closely argued, persistent, non-violent dissent. No Sinhala government since Independence in 1948 has been responsive to the reasonable demands of the Tamil minority.

The test that is used to determine whether a dissident armed force is an “armed group” as opposed to a “terrorist group” is set out in Article 1 of Protocol Additional to the Geneva Convention of 1947. This states that in an

“armed conflict... which takes place in the territory of a High Contracting Party (the GOSL in this case)... between it’s armed forces and dissident armed forces or other organised groups which, under responsible command, exercise such control over a part of it’s territory as to enable them to carry out sustained and concentrated military operations and to implement this Protocol.”⁵

In the armed conflict that has been occurring in Sri Lanka since at least 1983, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has met these requirements.

- 1 Military operations
- 2 Organised command
- 3 Organisational capacity
4. Control over territory

They openly carry arms and distinguish themselves from the civilian population and other requirements of combatant forces recognised by international law.

Even the United Nations has recognised that conditions have been met to invoke at least international armed conflict rules – the 1987 United Nations Commission on Human Rights Resolution. The UN Human Rights Commission in 1987 dealt almost exclusively with humanitarian law applied to the conflict in Sri Lanka.

The LTTE has therefore fulfilled the requirements of an Armed Group (cf. a Terrorist Group). I might add that an Armed Group is protected by the Geneva Conventions and other humanitarian laws, in a civil war situation. Simply to ban them or demonise them as

⁵ UN.Doc.a/32/44/annex 11, 1947, reprinted in 16 I.L.M.1442 (1977).

'terrorists' is inappropriate and unhelpful. The GOSL has to sit down and negotiate with them. It is of interest that the country most affected by the LTTE i.e Sri Lanka, is one of the countries that has not banned the LTTE or restricted their movements.

There has been a failure of the international community to recognise the existence of an armed conflict in Sri Lanka which meets at least international standards for an internal armed conflict according to human rights law and humanitarian law principles. Increasingly, this armed conflict is dismissed as an exercise in 'terrorism' especially after the '9/11' New York bombing. This is, of course, welcomed by the GOSL which is capitalising on the readily available funds and military hardware 'to fight terrorism'. In reality this is to fight its own civilian Tamil people.

Genuine terrorism

There are five groups involved in genuine terrorism in Sri Lanka

1. The Sri Lankan Armed Forces (Sinhalese)
2. The LTTE (Tamil)
3. The JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) – a Sinhalese group who initially labelled themselves as Marxists but are now clearly ethno-religious chauvinists.
4. Sinhalese hoodlums with their masters in the Government.
5. The Security Division (Sinhalese) of the President and other politicians. Some of this group are Sinhalese criminals and gangsters who have terrorised the Police and the public.
6. Paramilitary groups (Tamil) who are anti-LTTE Tamil dissidents, currently being sponsored by the Armed Forces.

1. The Sri Lankan Armed Forces

The acts of terrorism unleashed by the Sri Lankan Armed Forces on the Tamil civilians in the North and East have been extensive. Quantitatively this is the most serious problem as far as terrorism is concerned. It is not only ongoing but progressive.

The atrocities and human rights abuses by the Sri Lankan Armed Forces have been extensively documented by internationally credited organisations, in particular, Amnesty International. This has included the carpet bombing of Jaffna in 1995, the bombing of Hindu temples, churches, refugee camps, hospitals, markets, schools, public buildings and infrastructure. There has been extensive destruction of civilian property and lives in indiscriminate and extensive bombing and shelling.

The extensive destruction of civilian structures is very well documented⁶ and leaves no doubt that the intention is to terrorise the Tamil people.

The Armed Forces have also terrorised the Sinhalese in the South who have opposed the Government.

The difference between the terrorism of the Armed Forces and the LTTE, is that while the latter has been internationally condemned as Terrorists, the former, who are much more guilty of inflicting terror, are not.

⁶ <http://www.sangam.org/EELAM/page1.htm>

2. The LTTE

There have been definite acts of terrorism unleashed by the LTTE. They have included the massacre of Sinhalese villagers in the Tamil East and attacks in Colombo. They have also included the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991

The last terrorist attack was a bombing of the International Airport in Colombo in July 2001, since when there have been no significant attacks.

An American lawyer, who is not a Sri Lankan or former Sri Lankan, read the above sentence and contacted me to say that what I have stated is not correct. The International Airport in Colombo is not only a civilian airport but a military one used by the GOSL Air Force. As such, it is a legitimate military target, an attack on which cannot be labelled as an act of terrorism, as I have done. Moreover, this was when there was an on-going war between the GOSL and the LTTE. It is a very valid point.

A further point is that on 11 May 2006, with a Ceasefire Agreement in operation (repeatedly confirmed by the GOSL), the Sri Lankan Air Force bombed the Vanni in the LTTE-controlled area. Kfir jets conducted at least eight bombing raids on an area between Mankulam and Oddusuddan, in the Vanni, the declared target being the LTTE airstrip.

The LTTE has been accused of the assassination of Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar (August 2005) on which basis they have been declared a terrorist organisation in several countries. There is not a shred of evidence that the LTTE were involved. Despite several investigations initiated by the GOSL, it has not been possible to convince the Supreme Court in Colombo that the LTTE were responsible.

The LTTE had much to lose and nothing to gain by this particular assassination. On the other hand, the top brass in the Sri Lankan Armed Forces and Sinhala extremists who have been urging a tough stance against the LTTE, have much to gain by attempting to incriminate the LTTE in this assassination. This is important because if the LTTE are cleared of this assassination (as is likely), the basis for the ban of the LTTE in several countries becomes highly questionable,

Much has been made of the recent attack in the Army Headquarters in Colombo of Major General Sarath Fonseka, Head of the Sri Lankan Armed Forces. Even if this was by the LTTE, it is an encounter between combatants. When one dons a military uniform (an Army uniform or a LTTE one), the risk of being killed or injured has to be accepted. If the Army has the right to attack LTTE cadres (which it has done extensively despite the CFA), then by the same token, it is acceptable for the LTTE to attack members of the Armed Forces at whatever level, and at whatever locality. Killing unarmed civilians is an entirely different proposition.

3. Other groups

Because of space constraints, I will not deal with the terrorism of the other groups except to say that the terrorism currently being unleashed on the Tamil civilian population by groups opposed to the LTTE and working with the Government Armed Forces, is serious. It includes the assassination of hundreds of civilians, alleged supporters of the LTTE, Tamil journalists and even Tamil members of Parliament eg Joseph Pararajasingham (the

Tamil MP from the East gunned down in Church on Christmas Day 2005), and even his successor.

I might add that the Sinhalese JVP who unleashed massive terror on the Sinhalese civilians in the South in 1971 and again in 1988, which nearly overthrew an elected Government, were not branded as terrorists, nor was the area they came from, bombed. That is the difference between being a Sinhalese and a Tamil in Sri Lanka. The JVP are now part of the Government!

Child recruitment

The recruitment of children for military purposes by the LTTE has been justifiably condemned. Recruitment of children by force (or for that matter, adults) can never be justified.

There is, however, another side to this problem, which, of course, the GOSL (to say nothing of their supporters in the international community) do not mention.

What are the options facing a Tamil child in say, Jaffna? Education is in chaos. Some 35 schools are closed in the Peninsula, many in the areas declared to be High Security Zones by the GOSL Armed Forces. That the GOSL could not, or would not, order the 60,000 troops in Jaffna to a more acceptable area, freeing up at least some of the schools to say nothing of the best agricultural lands in Jaffna, is an indictment of the Government.

With education in chaos, and the prospect for employment in war-ravaged Jaffna being remote, about the only option available to Jaffna youths is to join the LTTE. This they are doing since they see no other future.

Those who are concerned about the Rights of Children should ensure that normalcy returns to the area. This cannot be done with an Army of Occupation of serious proportions (60,000) in the area.

In the Covenant signed by the GOSL for the Protection of Children, there are two optional protocols - A and B. The GOSL signed Optional Protocol A which relates to the recruitment of children for military purposes. This was readily done for obvious reasons.

With hypocrisy that beggars belief, the GOSL has refused to sign Optional Protocol B which relates to child prostitution. There are several thousand child prostitutes "servicing" the tourist industry in the Sinhala South. The GOSL refuses to sign this protocol perhaps because it will damage the dollar-earning tourist trade. I can think of no other reason. International organisations concerned with the Rights of the Child are remarkably silent on this. It certainly puts their credibility on the line.

In a Report which has just reached me, and the veracity of which I have not been able to check, I gather that the GOSL is recruiting 15 year old boys into the Armed Forces. Given the serious problems faced by the GOSL in recruiting people for the Armed Forces and even conscription being considered, I think the Report is plausible.

LTTE as the representatives of the Tamil people

The LTTE claim to be the sole representatives of the Tamil people, a claim that has been questioned in many countries.

Whether or not they are the sole representatives of the Tamil people, one thing is certain, they are the only Tamil militant group who are prepared to challenge the GOSL to free their people from Sinhala domination. It is a highly significant fact that in a recent survey conducted by a non-Tamil peace group in Colombo, some 85% of Tamils surveyed who were living in the *Government-controlled* areas in the North and East opted for the LTTE to be in charge of any possible interim administration of their area. If a similar study had been conducted in the LTTE-controlled area, the percentage would have been even higher.

Where the security of the Tamil people in the North and East is concerned, there is no doubt that the only thing that stands between the GOSL (in particular the Armed Forces) and annihilation of these people is the LTTE.

Even the LTTE was unable to prevent the extensive destruction of Jaffna town and the flattening of Charvakacheri, the 2nd largest town in the Jaffna Peninsula by the Sri Lankan Armed Forces in 1995. This was so serious that even the then UN Secretary General Butros Butros-Ghali had to appeal to the international community for help 'to assist the displaced people' of Jaffna.

These are documented realities that must be appreciated.

A de facto State

After a series of battles with the GOSL which they have won, the LTTE have established a large area, the Vanni, in the Northern Province under their control. From all reports this area is functioning extremely well with its own administration, legal system, medical and welfare systems, education system, and of course, their army. Corruption is almost non-existent and the administrative efficiency seems to be of a far higher calibre as was evidenced by the way the tsunami relief was handled in the extensive area in the North East that was ravaged.

The functioning of this *de facto* State has been convincingly documented in a recent paper published by Professor Kristian Stokke. [*Building the Tamil Eelam State: Emerging State Institutions and Forms of Governance in LTTE-controlled Areas in Sri Lanka*](#) Professor Stokke, the Professor of Geography in the Department of Sociology and Geography, University of Oslo, has been studying the emerging State of Tamil Eelam for the past several years. His extensive Report certainly seems to indicate that the *de facto* Tamil State is functioning far better than the corrupt, incompetent and chaotic State in the Sinhala South.

de Facto to de Jure

It is absurd to suggest, at this point in time, that the well functioning *de facto* state established by the LTTE be dismantled and handed back to the chaotic GOSL in the South. It is simply unrealistic to believe that it will happen nor will it be in the interests of the people in the area.

What is important is for the international community to appreciate that such a *de facto* State exists (Professor Stokke's paper will provide the necessary evidence). The responsibility of the international community is to see that military and other facilities are not made available to the GOSL to destroy this already existing and functioning State which has not been built by the people in the area with help from Tamil expatriates and others.

A call for the LTTE to disarm

The calls for the disarming of the LTTE, clearly initiated by the GOSL and echoed by many other Governments who do not know the ground realities, are clearly unrealistic. If the LTTE are disarmed or crushed (both of which are highly unlikely) the Tamil people and their struggles will be wiped in one afternoon since, as I have said, it is the LTTE which is the only force which is preventing the genocide of the Tamils in the North and East by the GOSL and its Armed Forces.

If the LTTE will not disarm and cannot be disarmed, then we have the situation of two armies under separate command in one country. I know of no country where such a state exists. If one of the two armies cannot be disarmed, the only option is to divide the country.

Proscribing of the LTTE and blocking expatriate funding

Trying to marginalize the LTTE by banning or restricting movement of its members or supporters is serious, non productive (in fact counter-productive) and meaningless. It simply does not make any sense. My recent address (7 March 2006) to EU Parliamentarians⁷ addresses some of the issues involved.

It is of interest that Sri Lanka, the country most affected by the LTTE, has banned and then 'de-banned' them! Yet, other countries not affected by the LTTE, continue to ban them. It defies reason.

Peace talks without the LTTE is like trying to clap with one hand. Whether one loves them or hates them, their presence and cooperation in any peace deal is essential. Those who believe otherwise do not appreciate the ground realities in Sri Lanka, especially in the Tamil areas.

What the EU (and other countries such as the US and Canada that have gone down this path) are doing is to opt out of the Sri Lankan Peace Process since it is not possible to host negotiations with a banned 'terrorist' organisation, as the British will confirm in their futile action in banning the IRA which then had to be 'de-banned' to enable negotiations to occur.

If the EU and other countries that have banned the LTTE have concerns about their human rights record, it makes more sense to invite them and express whatever concerns there are and ask them to address these concerns to the satisfaction of internationally credible

⁷ sangam.org/taraki/articles/2006/03-10_EU_Contributiont.php?uid=1582
www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=17405
www.tamilnation.org/conflictresolution/tamileelam/norway/contents/16.htm

human rights organizations. This is not achieved by banning them, any more than motor vehicle accidents will be prevented by banning them. The underlying issues have to be addressed.

Inappropriate comments in Colombo by a succession of US Ambassadors and others from Washington who are just 'passing through', have a disastrous effect. It markedly strengthens the hand of the extreme Sinhala chauvinists in Colombo to whom it is music.

On January 9, 2006, Ambassador Jeffrey Lunstead, addressed the American Chamber of Commerce on "*Peace and Prosperity: US Policy Goals in Sri Lanka 2006*" and made some outrageous comments which brought applause from the Sinhala ethno-religious chauvinists and the Government-controlled media. "*If the LTTE chooses to abandon peace, however we want it to be clear, they will face a stronger, more capable and more determined Sri Lankan military*". How much more inflammatory can one get?

Shortly after this, Nicholas Burns, the US Undersecretary for Political Affairs 'passing through' Colombo said that the US would take a hard line against the LTTE, The next day, Colombo was plastered with anti-Tamil slogans and demands that the LTTE be crushed, however impossible this has turned out to be in the last three decades. This in turn puts pressure on the Sri Lankan Government to adopt an even more hard-line position in negotiations and talks with the LTTE. It is this hard-line stance that has prevented the GOSL from coming up with any meaningful solution for power sharing with the Tamils.

The point I make here is that irresponsible activity of countries with their own geopolitical agenda is preventing the GOSL from coming up with any meaningful proposals to enable a negotiated solution to the ethnic problem. In fact, it strengthens the hand of an already hard-line and repressive regime and makes Peace Talks such a farce.

As I have said, the LTTE is not the problem or the cause of the problem in Sri Lanka. The cause is Sinhalese politicians and extremists trying to make Sri Lanka into a Sinhala-Buddhist country and discriminate against the Tamils to solicit the support of the Sinhala majority to get into and remain in power. The cause of the violence is the result of Sri Lankan Governments ignoring the non-violent protests of the Tamils over a prolonged period and meeting non-violence with the violence of the Police, Armed Forces and State-sponsored hoodlums. The LTTE is not the *cause* of the problem, it is the *result*.

Banning LTTE fundraising

International governments are comfortable pouring money and weapons into the coffers of a corrupt, irresponsible and racist Government and its murderous Armed Forces, but frowns on attempts to meet this by the other side which essentially means help from expatriate Tamils.

It is very simplistic to think that banning fund raising for the LTTE at an individual level will work. One could make it more difficult for the LTTE (or any other organisation) to raise funds but to block it, check it or even curb it is impossible. To believe that it is possible is to live in a dream world far removed from reality.

There are hundreds of thousands of expatriate Tamils living in some of the wealthiest countries in the world, many employed at a high level, who have families and extended families in the North and East. They are aware that the government has opted out of

governing these people. They will send money to anyone or any organisation prepared to look after them.

Whatever they think of the LTTE, whether they love them or hate them, it is blindingly obvious that it is only the LTTE that is prepared to challenge the anti-Tamil chauvinism of the Sinhala Government. They see the LTTE as their sole representatives. How the LTTE got to this position, is a separate issue. But the reality is that they are there and unlikely to quit.

Expatriate Tamils may be divided in their support (emotional, physical or financial) of the LTTE but are realistic enough to appreciate that if the LTTE collapses, the Tamil struggle for justice for the Tamil people will be over. If the LTTE collapses (an unlikely scenario) or are disarmed (an even more unlikely scenario), the Tamils will not be **at** the Conference table but **under** it, as they have been for the past 50 years, waiting for scraps to fall from their Sinhala masters at the table.

With no other Tamil militant group prepared to stand up against the GOSL, almost by default, expatriate Tamil support will go to the LTTE.

Instead of embarking on partisan, inflammatory and futile activity, the international community can exert pressure on the GOSL to come up with reasonable offers to the Tamils to address the considerable problems faced by these people. Many of these countries (the US, EU, Japan, India and Australia) have substantial clout, if only because they are major trading partners with a near-bankrupt Sri Lanka. It is clout which if applied, will bring the GOSL to its senses rather than pursue a path which will inevitably lead to a very destructive war.

Military and financial assistance to the GOSL

Many countries, with the exception of Norway, instead of being part of the solution, have become part of the problem. The military and financial assistance they so freely give are multifactorial. There is the 'old-boy network' that exists between countries - they are members of the same 'club'- the UN. The Sri Lankan vote may be needed in the 'Club' when countries embark on some military adventure. An example is given below..

There are substantial gains to be made in the geopolitical and even in the economic field by these countries. The aid so freely given is never without strings. Sri Lanka is an excellent dumping ground for weapons past their 'use-by date', a bonus is that suppliers even get paid for this.. I gather that US arms manufacturers have large stocks of such weapons and that the call went out for suitable 'dumping grounds'. The response was that it was becoming increasingly difficult to find such places but "Sri Lanka is still receptive".

Leading this group of utterly irresponsible countries that are facilitating the war in Sri Lanka is the USA. The US has provided about US\$500,000 to Sri Lanka every year as military grants under the International Military Education and Training Program (IMET). Washington has increased its military credits under its Foreign Military Finances (FMF) program from \$496,000 in 2005 to an estimated \$1 million in 2006. These credits could be used by Sri Lanka to buy US weapons or "counter- terrorism" equipment.

On 23 February 2002, the then Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe signed a Peace Pact with the LTTE. The duplicitous nature of Sinhala politicians was shown yet again when, with the guns silenced after 18 years of war, some 64,000 dead and over a million

refugees, one of Wickremesinghe's first acts was to set off to Washington to seek (more) funds for his military! The US Military Sales Program had specifically excluded Sri Lanka because of an abysmally poor human rights record. However after the Bush-Wickremesinghe meeting in 2003, this restriction was withdrawn.

In the address I have referred to, US Ambassador Jeffrey Lunstead explained this military assistance with some bizarre reasoning:- "*The purpose of this program (of US Government's military assistance) is not to encourage a return to war but to make a return to peace by making it clear that war will be more costly and unsuccessful.*" This is incomprehensible and dangerous nonsense because thousands of lives are at stake.

As I have said, Nicholas Burns, US Undersecretary for Political Affairs, just 'dropped in' to have a quick lunch in Colombo. He happened to have some US\$ 500 million from the Millennium Account which he pledged to the GOSL. By a happy coincidence, there happened to be a US backed resolution against Iran on its nuclear programme before the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which it was considering referring to the UN Security Council. Sri Lanka had to make a decision on its position. The Sri Lankan Foreign Minister reminded his cabinet colleagues and his President that the US was helping the government economically and in the 'fight against terrorism' and that a decision on Iran should not antagonise the US. This is nothing but 'cheque-book diplomacy' of the worst kind. While it will help a Government looking for funds to fight its own people, it is likely to do serious long term damage since Iran is the largest buyer of Sri Lankan tea, which, of course, is of no concern to the US.

The US is not alone in this irresponsible activity. There are many countries such as Israel, Britain, Singapore, Pakistan and China that are playing a duplicitous role in advocating peace in Sri Lanka but supplying the GOSL with military hardware or financial assistance to purchase this in the international arms market (often for their economic gain). What is worse, there is moral support freely available to a very repressive and brutal regime.

Western governments do not give military aid to Sri Lanka and its Armed Forces unaware of the fact that this will be used to kill a section of its population (the Tamils). It is not ignorance but irresponsibility, committed with an eye on the incoming dollar, and with no concern for the humanitarian disaster it will cause.

The misuse of donated funds

The GOSL (like many 3rd World governments) claim that they and they alone are responsible for "Security". In Sri Lanka "Security" is essentially to "Secure" a Government from its own people. As such the Government can buy arms and receive military support and even training on how to kill efficiently. It can even decide who goes where in Sri Lanka, as the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan realised when he was prevented from visiting the Tsunami devastated North and East and ex-President Clinton could only fly over the North East.

The diversion of aid given for development to the purchase of weapons is well known. Victor Ostrovsky, a former Mossad officer, has documented this in his well known book.⁸

⁸ *By way of Deception. The makings of a Mossad Officer* Victor Ostrovsky and Clair Hoy. It was the *New York Times* best seller.

He describes how the GOSL diverted millions of dollars given for the massive Mahaveli irrigation scheme, to the purchase of weapons.

Even if donor money does not go directly to the purchase of weapons, it can be used to free-up an equivalent amount of money for the purchase of weapons. A good example was the recent Tsunami. The millions of dollars that came pouring in was used for Reconstruction which was perfectly legitimate, but it freed up millions of dollars which the GOSL would have had to find for this. Evidence for this was seen in the weapons buying spree that Sri Lanka went on to China, Pakistan, and the US, to name just a few, after the tsunami disaster.

It is most unlikely that foreign governments are unaware of all this. It is more likely that they do not care.

SOLUTIONS

There are 3 possible solutions to the ethnic conflict, but the choices available *now* to the GOSL have markedly decreased.

1. A united Sri Lanka with a nominal devolution of power to the Tamils.

This has 'worked' for the past 50 years. Attempts by the GOSL to persist with this 'solution' will inevitably lead to war which neither side can win, or which will become a war of attrition which the country simply cannot afford.

For the first time in the history of the Tamil people, their demands have been backed by one of the most powerful militant armies in the world. What the GOSL got away in the past will not work in the future.

2. A Federal set up (internal self-determination).

A Federal Tamil State has the advantage that it will have extensive international backing. The international community has still not "come of age" to recognise the absolute need for external self-determination and the formation of independent nations where a national minority has been discriminated against and dominated.

There was the possibility of a Federal solution working three (or more) *decades* ago. I doubt if it exists today. For any Federal arrangement to work there must be trust in the Centre. There is, for very good reasons, a complete absence of trust by the Tamils in the Sinhala-dominated Government. As such I cannot see how a Federal arrangement can work.

Moreover, as I have just said, a Federal solution with two separate Armies under separate command, does not exist in any country that I am aware of. I cannot see that Sri Lanka will be the exception.

3. A Separate Tamil State (Eelam) and a Separate Sinhala State

This would essentially be a reversal (or partial reversal) of the disastrous British colonial 'construct' referred to earlier. There is no doubt that the two States, with hostilities a thing of the past, will develop (as did Malaysia and Singapore).

A separate Tamil State and a separate Sinhalese State will enable each State to develop to its maximum potential. As I have stressed earlier, development is the key issue. The Tamil areas will never develop unless the keys to development are removed from Sinhalese hands and given to those (Tamils) in the area.

The Sinhalese areas will never develop unless the money currently being squandered on this unnecessary conflict is directed to the South.

There is a further issue in the Sinhalese South. For at least the past three decades, the only 'policy' that competing Sinhalese parties have found it necessary to adopt, is to promise greater and greater discrimination against the Tamils if elected to power. If one Party says, "We will not give anything more than a minimal devolution of power", the other Party says "We will not even give that".

Once the 'Tamil issue' is removed, Sinhalese politicians will have to come up with some *real* policies to address the serious issues facing the Sinhalese people – rampant corruption, grinding poverty, lawlessness etc. The result will be that the Sinhala State will end up with better governance.

Devolution of power within each State

Once the separate States have been established, a devolution of power within each State is mandatory. This will not only maximise development, but will also address the genuine fears of the Muslim community who are widely dispersed, both in the Tamil and the Sinhalese areas.

Confederation

Once the two separate States have developed (and not before), there can be a loose Confederation, if desirable or necessary. A Confederation is neither possible nor desirable, at the moment.

Sri Lanka – too small to be divided

The claim that Sri Lanka is too small to be divided is arrant nonsense. Sri Lanka is 65,600 sq km which is bigger than 71 of the 191 UN nations. If divided, the Sinhala State will be larger than 62 UN nations, including 18 in Europe among which are six of its richest (Switzerland, Denmark, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxemburg and Liechtenstein). The new Tamil State will be larger than 37 UN countries, and 100 times larger than Singapore which is fast becoming the world's richest country on a per capita basis.

On a population basis, of the 191 UN countries, 138 have smaller populations than Sri Lanka. The Sinhala State will have larger populations than 134 UN members, the Tamil State larger than 70.

There is not a grain of truth in the claim that Sri Lanka is too small to accommodate two States which would be economically viable with a reasonable prospect of prosperity. To believe otherwise is egregious fallacy.

Distinguished political geographers have predicted that the number of States represented in the United Nations would increase to at least 300 by the year 2010. Given the intensity and spread of national liberation movements across the globe, that prediction would seem an understatement. Indeed, on the eve of relinquishing his position as United Nations

Secretary-General, Mr Boutros Boutros Ghali estimated that the member-States in the organisation would number four hundred by the year 2020.

Implementing the solutions

The problems in implementing the obvious solution of two separate states are national (the Sinhala South), India, and foreign countries.

The basic problem is propaganda and the misrepresentation of the situation on the ground by the GOSL to both the Sinhalese people in the South, and the International community.

1. The Sinhalese South

There is not the slightest doubt that the Sinhalese people in the South are being seriously misled by their own Government.

- a) That the cause of the grinding poverty in the South is due to the Tamil Tigers. The reality is that poverty in the South is due to poor economic management, corruption, incompetent governance and the unsettled ethnic conflict which is damaging tourism and foreign investment.
- b) That the Tamil Tigers can be crushed. The 4th largest army in the world (India) tried to do this in 1988 and failed. It is most unlikely that the Sri Lankan Army can accomplish what India has failed to do. If war breaks out again, what will be crushed is the economy, as Sri Lanka will face a crippling debt because of an escalating expenditure on weapons and a dramatic slump in international aid, including aid from the aid donors, and a crash in tourism.
- c) The Sinhala people are not being informed that a division of the country, which will settle the problem, will result in a development of the North and the East and the Sinhala South, which will be the only way forward for Sri Lanka. It has not been pointed out that any other solution will be suicidal.
- d) The Sinhalese people are unaware that a separate Tamil state already exists, is functioning well and is no threat to the Sinhala South

2. India

The major problem in the division of Sri Lanka is India. India will not countenance a solution to the Sri Lankan ethnic problem which India itself is not prepared to grant to its own minorities.

This is a matter that has to be addressed by the international community, i.e. pressure exerted on the Indian Government to accept a solution to the Sri Lankan problem which is not necessarily applicable to India. For a start the Indian minorities have not been treated by their central Government in any way similar to the brutality unleashed on the Tamils by the Sri Lankan Government.

The very recent election, by an overwhelming majority, of Mr Karunanidhi as the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, might make a difference to the Indian attitude towards Sri Lanka. He has been sympathetic to the cause of the Tamil people for many years. The DMK Party to which he belongs, is in coalition with the Congress Party of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Attitudes towards Sri Lanka could change, the notorious Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) of the Indian secret service, notwithstanding.

It is of interest that the two countries most opposed to a Separate Tamil State, US and India, have, when advantageous for them, been the cause of the break-up of countries eg Panama from Colombia, East Bengal from Pakistan. It is breathtaking hypocrisy.

3. International Community

The international community will have to accept the ground reality and not attempt to try and solve the problem in Sri Lanka based on the false propaganda and biased views put out by the GOSL.

The banning of the LTTE by an increasing number of countries is an absurdity. As is obvious, the LTTE are an essential part of the negotiating process. There is not the slightest doubt that any negotiations entered into without the LTTE will be pointless.

As I have repeatedly said, what the countries that have banned the LTTE have done is to opt out of assisting with the negotiations, eg holding peace talks. Another aspect which may not be appreciated is that unilateral action taken against the LTTE by foreign governments, eg banning them or freezing their assets, only strengthens the hand of the Sinhala extremists who will put increasing pressure on Rajapakse not to offer any realistic terms of settlement to the Tamil people but to embark on a (unwinnable) military solution.

President Mahinda Rajapakse

I have tried to avoid personal references in this Submission. However, I must comment of the newly elected President, Mahinda Rajapakse and his predecessor, Chandrika Kumaratunga

I have expressed my concerns⁹ about Rajapakse even before the Presidential Elections based on his previous record as the Prime Minister, his election manifesto and his pre-election alliance with Sinhala extremists. It is on the net but I will try and get it attached to this document if possible.

⁹ [www.sangam.org/taraki/articles/2005/ 11-01_Mahinda_Rajapakse_The_Road_to_Disaster.php?uid=1280](http://www.sangam.org/taraki/articles/2005/11-01_Mahinda_Rajapakse_The_Road_to_Disaster.php?uid=1280)

www.tamilcanadian.com/pageview.php?ID=3558&SID=130

www.tamilnation.org/forum/brian/051031mahinda.htm

After his Election, the alarm bells were even louder when he appointed some hard line anti-Tamil extremists to senior military and even Government posts.

The past

The past is probably the best guide to the future. History may well be about to repeat itself in Sri Lanka.

In August 1994 Chandrika Kumaratunga was elected Prime Minister. The main plank of her campaign was that she would have unconditional talks with the LTTE and end this war. No Sinhalese leader has ever had the support that she had from all ethnic groups in a war-weary Sri Lanka.

In December 1994, she won the Presidential elections and became the Executive President with sweeping powers. Talks with the LTTE, which had commenced when she was Prime Minister, were continued. Both sides had to nominate “accredited representatives” for the Talks.

While the LTTE sent several senior members and even the Head of the Political Wing, the GOSL sent a lawyer, a civil servant, a bank manager, an architect, a university lecturer and even the Bishop of Colombo! This motley bunch were sent by the GOSL to address a difficult political problem. They were messengers, and behaved as such.

While the Talks went on discussing all sorts of things, the GOSL went on a spending spree to beef-up the Armed Forces. Supersonic aircraft, helicopter gun ships, gun boats, armoured vehicles and heavy artillery were freely purchased. Several thousand men were recruited into the Armed Forces.

None of this escaped the attention of the LTTE. After more than six months of nonsensical Talks, the LTTE called off the ‘Talks’ on 19 April 1995, Eelam War 3 had started.

Jaffna was to see the visible evidence of Kumaratunga’s invisible purchase of weapons. The military offensive started on 1 October 1995 with a massive artillery and aerial bombardment of LTTE positions, supported by thousands of ground troops.

On 17 October 1995 came “Operation Riviressa” (Sun Rays), the target being densely populated Jaffna city. Half a million terrified people took to the road, carrying bare essentials and dragging their children, the elderly and sick, to flee the assault. Butros Butros Ghali, the then UN Secretary General, called on the International Community to assist the uprooted people of Jaffna. Kumaratunga’s (Tamil) Foreign Minister cautioned the UN not to exaggerate the “*minor problem*” of an “*internally displaced*” people that concerns the “*internal affairs*” of a “*Sovereign State*”.

Extensive damage was done to Jaffna and then, Charvakacheri, the 2nd largest town in the Jaffna Peninsular, was bombed flat.

Commenting on this later, the Indian General who led the Indian Forces in Sri Lanka in 1987, said that neither he nor his Government would have even considered such a ‘broad-front’ attack in a densely populated area because of the certainty of high civilian casualties. But the GOSL had no such compunction. Those responsible must be charged with Crimes Against Humanity, for indeed, that is what it was.

The present

We see a re-run of the same thing under Kumaratunga's successor, President Rajapakse - a promise of peace before elections, nonsensical Talks after elections, and time being bought for the Armed Forces to be beefed-up. War is clearly the next step on the GOSL agenda.

President Rajapakse, who doubles as the Finance Minister, stepped up the "Defense allocation" (to 'defend' the country from its own people) from Rs 52 billion in 2004, to Rs 56.6 billion in 2005 and now, in his wisdom, to a staggering Rs 91.6 billion in 2006. To give Rajapakse credit for (rare) honesty, he has said that his 'negotiations' with the LTTE is only till he has been able to arm the Sri Lankan Armed Forces!

With the newly acquired fire-power and some very hard-liners in charge, there will be little left of the Tamils in the North and East, should war break out.

There is not the slightest doubt that President Rajapakse is someone from whom a negotiated political settlement is least likely. For the LTTE to have further negotiations with him would appear to be pointless. For a start he has not delivered on the GOSL commitments in the first round of Peace Talks in Geneva. One of these was that the Tamil paramilitaries be disarmed. When interviewed by a German newspaper soon after the Talks, he claimed he knew nothing about the Paramilitaries!

There are very strong indications that he will lead Sri Lanka into another war. The only three groups who can possibly stop him are the Sinhala people, the International Community, in particular the crucial Aid-givers, and India.

Rajapakse's strategy is patently obvious - to demonise and weaken the LTTE as much as possible, while markedly increasing the military might of the GOSL, bluff the International Community that he is a 'man of Peace', and then embark on an all out war to crush the LTTE and the Tamil people. If this means a crushing of the economy and of lives, both Tamil and Sinhala, I doubt if he cares. The world must be made aware of this very real possibility. By the time the world finds out, it may be too late for the Tamils and for Sri Lanka.

A Personal note

Although it might appear otherwise, my stance, my views and my writings over the past quarter of a century, have not been anti-Sri Lankan Government (fortunately of differing political persuasions), but against the ruthlessness, corruption and arrogance of power. The amassing of vast unfettered power by a State, a country, an institution or an individual or group of individuals, regardless of ideology, results in excesses and abuses of human rights, which is what has happened in Sri Lanka since Independence 50 years ago.

When independent, thinking people, begin to rally under a flag or yoke themselves blindly to their leaders, political and even religious, it is time for all of us to sit up and worry.

It is a scene beyond description to see Buddhist monks, supposed followers of one of the greatest teachers of Peace and non-violence the world has ever known, protesting in their thousands in the streets of Colombo against the Peace Process and demanding that the

Tamil people be crushed. It is a challenge for Buddhists and 'half-Buddhists' such as myself (my mother and her entire family were devout Buddhists), to challenge the right of these men in yellow robes to leave their Temples, enter Parliament and destructively dabble in politics. It is a challenge that Buddhists have not taken up, indeed the opposite. Apologists have even tried to justify this absurdity.

Irrespective of one's ethnicity or race, it is a terrible thing to support a Government, of whatever political flavour, that has treated, and continues to treat, a section of its people, the way a succession of Sri Lankan Governments have treated the Tamil minority, especially in the North and East.

The Tamil people have suffered enormously for no other reason than that they are Tamils who live in the North and East. Thousands have lost their homes, their livelihood, their parents, their children, their limbs, and their lives. More than a million have been made refugees, both inside the country and outside. Ceasefires and Peace Pacts have been declared and violated. The Government has called it a "War for Peace", whatever that might mean. It can only mean a War with the Tamils for Peace for the Sinhalese. The cynic could claim that the Sri Lankan Government is killing the Tamil people to save them from the Tamil Tigers.

As we stand today on the brink of another war, to fuel it by supporting ethnic chauvinism and not challenging the Government that has shown nothing but contempt for its people, is a terrible thing to do.

The Government claims that the Tamil demand for self-determination undermines the sovereignty of Sri Lanka. What is being undermined is not national sovereignty but democracy.

It is a dreadful thing for a Government to cynically manipulate the suffering of the Sinhala poor and claim that all will be well if only Tamil resistance i.e. the Tamil people in the North and East, can be crushed. It is unacceptable for the Government to intimidate, threaten and bribe the Media, paid for by Sinhalese *and Tamil* taxpayers, to convince the Sinhala people that any 'concessions' to the Tamil people are a "*sell out of a Sinhala-Buddhist country to the Tamils*".

I have been called "unpatriotic", a "traitor" or even a "Tamil Tiger" because I have supported the cause of the Tamil people to live with equality, dignity, safety and without the violation of basic human rights. It is dangerous to cede to self-proclaimed Sinhala "patriots", the Sinhala Government, the Buddhist clergy, or *anyone*, for that matter, the right to define what patriotism to Sri Lanka should be. It is a tragedy for a country, any country, when patriotism is defined on how close one stands to a national policy, however unjust and discriminatory it is to a section of its people.

The Sinhala belief, which is now becoming ingrained to an alarming degree, is that if one does not support Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism one is, almost by definition, a Tamil Tiger terrorist. Tragically, the Sinhala majority is increasingly refusing to acknowledge that there is an alternative to Sinhala ethno-religious chauvinism.

The line between ethno-religious chauvinism and patriotism is being deliberately and successfully blurred by the Government and Sinhala extremists who support it. The

distinction between democracy and oligarchy is fast disappearing in the country. I firmly believe that a better Sri Lanka, divided if necessary, is possible.

Brian Senewiratne

Brisbane, Australia 9 June 2006