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“There is no ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka - as some media mistakenly highlight”
President Mahinda Rajapaksa to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council – 28 September 2007

“There is no ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka - as some media mistakenly highlight.” These are the precise words said by Mahinda Rajapaksa to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council on 28 September 2007. After knowing this political attitude of the President of Sri Lanka, especially after so much loss of human life, what exactly is the political solution that the International Community is expecting from this government?

This is not only the position of Mahinda Rajapaksa - it is the position of every Sinhala ruler, right from the time of independence of the Island. As far as the Ethnic issue is concerned, in those days the Sinhala Leaders were fooling only the Tamils - but now they are fooling the International Community too.

A few important subjects must be analysed seriously. **Firstly**, what happened last month in the 10th session of the UN Human Rights Council, and the reaction of the Sri Lankan representatives. **Secondly**, what is happening presently in the UN Security Council on Sri Lanka. **Thirdly**, the behaviour of the Sri Lankan Embassies and the Media, and the effect these have on the relationship between the Tamil and Sinhala diaspora. **Fourthly**, the present dilemma of India and the international community.

10th session of the UN Human Rights Council

Now let us see what happened in the 10th session of the UN Human Rights Council. Ministers from France, Germany, Sweden, United Kingdom, Portugal and Netherlands raised their concerns about the humanitarian catastrophe being inflicted upon the people in the Vanni region. At the same time several Ambassadors, including those from Switzerland, Japan, Canada, Australia and the USA also raised their concerns. ***It is to be noted that for the first time in the history of the UN Human Rights Forums, the USA has raised its concerns on Sri Lanka.*** Not forgetting, of course, that many reputed international NGOs also expressed their concern. Continuing the task of her predecessor Louis Arbour, the present UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms Navaneetham Pillai also spoke of the situation with facts and figures.

In response to all these interventions, the reactions of the Sri Lankan representatives, both inside and outside the UN Human Rights Council are to be noted. *Inside the Council*, the same reply was given as usual since 1983, rather like a sermon in a religious ceremony. The only change in the response was the name of the individual who was saying it and the date of the sermon. As far as the Sri Lankan representatives in the UN Human Rights Forums are concerned, “Sri Lanka has neither killed nor abducted anyone - not today nor yesterday, nor even since 1948. Sri Lanka does not violate human rights. Tamils have equal rights in all aspects but one or two Tamils cry for no reason”. Those who raise their concerns about the human rights situation in Sri Lanka – if they are a Tamil, then he or she is a **“Terrorist”**, if they are a “Non Tamil”, then they are **“Terrorist Supporters”**. This will be followed by malicious writing about those individuals by Sri Lankan propagandists, in their racist media and disseminated by Sri Lankan Embassies world-wide.

John Holmes’ latest report

Sir John Holmes, United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under Secretary General of Humanitarian Affairs is a good example of the results of this attitude and practical action of the Sri Lankan government. As a Relief Coordinator of the UN, John Holmes made his first visit to Sri Lanka in August 2007. During his visit he told Reuters in an interview on 8 August 2007 that *“Aid agencies say 34 humanitarian staff have been killed in Sri Lanka since January 2006, including 17 local staff of Action Contre La Faim shot dead in the restive northeast a year ago in a massacre Nordic truce monitors blamed on security forces. There is a concern ... about the safety of humanitarian workers themselves and the record here is one of the worst in the world from that point of view.”*

As soon this was published by Reuters, John Holmes was branded as a **terrorist supporter** by the Sri Lankan government which then ensured the widespread publication of malicious propaganda against him. For example, the

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mr. Ratnasiri Wickremanayake told Parliament, "..... *The government cannot but feel that Sir John has contributed to those who seek to discredit the government and tarnish its international image.*" (**BBC-South Asia, 10 August 2007**)

Following the Prime Minister's statement, Chief Government Whip and late Minister, Jeyaraj Fernandopulle, said; "*I would say Holmes is completely a terrorist, a terrorist who supports terrorism. We consider people who support terrorists also terrorists. So Holmes, who supports the LTTE (Tamil Tigers), is also a terrorist. This person tries to tarnish the image of Sri Lanka internationally.*" He added. "*I think the LTTE has bribed Holmes.*" (**Reuters, 15 August 2007**).

As there were serious accusations pouring in from various corners of the World on the humanitarian catastrophe in Vanni, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka invited Sir John Holmes, as if pre-planned, to undertake a visit to Sri Lanka in February 2009. He visited Sri Lanka for the second time from 19 to 22 February 2009. Here we would like to mention that Sri Lanka continues to ignore several UN Special Rapporteurs requests for many years for a visit to Sri Lanka.

John Holmes' second mission to Sri Lanka was totally different from his first visit. This time, as soon as he arrived in Sri Lanka, he was briefed by President Rajapaksa and several Ministers. He was then accompanied to a Camp by the adviser to the President who is the President's brother and a Minister. There they met some displaced people. In fact, this transit Camp is actually hundreds of kilometres away from the actual location of the humanitarian disaster taking place. Anyhow, when John Holmes wanted to talk to some displaced persons, even the interpretation was done by a Minister and it is on the record that it was a completely false translation. For example, when a lady said that "**my son was taken away by the Army**", the translation was "**the LTTE has taken away my son**".

We do not find any fault with John Holmes! There is a general theory in *Data Processing* that predicts: "**garbage in garbage out**". Therefore, it is obvious that John Holmes' latest report on Sri Lanka was written **using both a magnifying glass and a telescope** – but not directing the view to the actual location where the disaster is taking place.

"The Fox and the Grapes"

Here it is very important to note what was said by the Sri Lankan Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights; Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of Foreign Affairs in response to a statement made by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights during the 10th session.

One said that *...the Sri Lankan Armed Forces have never, and will never, target civilians and expressed his disappointment and dismay*; the other one said, *"...conduct of the High Commissioner's Office in this instance was not that usually expected from the UN system"*; the Minister of Foreign Affairs said, *"These assessments are unfair in terms of conclusions and quite contrary to the factual position."* While these were said by government ministers and officials, the paid propagandists also published the usual dictatorial remarks which are not even worth repeating here.

http://sundaytimes.lk/090315/News/sundaytimesnews_02.html
<http://www.dailynews.lk/2009/03/17/news12.asp>)

In a democratic society each and everyone has their right to "*freedom of thought and expression*" and also to other rights. But one should not forget the attitude and the behaviour of some personalities. Consider the story of "**The Fox and the Grapes**" – **the fox was jumping up to eat grapes and as it could not reach the grapes, it said that the grapes were very sour.**

It is well known that out of 192 members states of the UN, Sri Lanka was the only country which objected to the appointment of the present High Commissioner and yet it was the very first country to meet her, on her 5th day in office. Photographs were taken for their publicity in the media.

(**For Photos** <http://www.lankamission.org/content/view/812/>)

UN Security Council

Presently what is happening in the UN Security Council is nothing other than Sri Lanka paying for what it has lobbied in the past. In the past, Sri Lankan representatives travelled all over the world saying that "**the LTTE is a threat to international peace and security**". This led to several countries banning this organisation, neither realising the realities, nor understanding the history of the island. Today, China and Russia are forced to the rescue of Sri Lanka in the UN Security Council, claiming that "**what is happening in Sri Lanka is not a threat** to international peace and security". This contradicts what was claimed by Sri Lanka in the past. On the one hand Sri Lanka is using illegal

Chemical weapons in the battle field and on the other hand Sri Lankan Embassies in foreign countries have become a policing force in those countries, carrying out false criminal investigations on the Tamil diaspora. For international propaganda, Sri Lanka always claims that the bloody conflict, the Tamil ethnic problem, is an **“internal problem”**. But it is well known that many foreign powers are directly involved in the military operations against the Tamils. ***Is it right to say that Sri Lanka is not a threat to international peace and security?***

Anyway, Russia is a country which supports the right to self-determination of the Republics of South Ossetia and Abkasia from Georgia. Russia refuses to accept that it is an internal problem of Georgia. It is true that China and Russia have their own problems with Tibet and Chechnya but both support the right to self-determination of the Palestinians which is no different to the situation of the people of Tamil Eelam. In fact, China and Russia need to be approached and given lessons about the Tamils' history (non violent struggle, abrogation of pacts, etc). Once they understand the genuine grievances of the Tamils, they will support the Tamils' just cause.

Since 1983, when the worst of the racial riots took place against the Tamils in Sri Lanka, different Sri Lankan governments have repeatedly held the position that if anyone says something in favour of Tamils this constitutes interference in the **“internal”** problems of Sri Lanka. Vice versa, if someone makes a comment in their favour, it will be accepted, given good publicity and used in their future propaganda. Whether one likes it or not, the Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka and in foreign countries are divided and hostile to each other in many aspects. Both the Sinhalese and the Tamils sought political asylum in foreign countries - on the grounds of class struggle and on the grounds of freedom struggle, respectively. At the same time professionals, academics and students of both communities also emigrated from the island and settled in foreign countries.

“You're either pro-LTTE or you're anti LTTE”

When we look at these diaspora – most Sinhalese who sought political asylum on the basis of class struggle and some Sinhalese professionals, openly support and justify the atrocities of the Sri Lankan state against the Tamils in the island. Whereas the Tamils who sought asylum on the grounds of freedom struggle and many Tamil professionals, academics and students support the pro-freedom organisation, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam - LTTE. In a speech made in Norway on 14 September 2008 popular Journalist and former CNN South Asian Bureau Chief Anita Pratap said that **“.....as you know, the Sri Lankan politics is highly polarised and the Tamil politics is also highly polarised, you're either pro-LTTE or you're anti LTTE.”**

In these circumstances, we should not ignore the reality that only a handful of Sinhalese support the human rights and the right to self-determination of the Tamils and very few Tamils support the Sinhala government. So few in both cases, that they are like the tiny stones one might rarely find in the rice! Within the last three years, Sri Lanka's open “Genocidal” policy has added fuel to the divisions among the Tamils and the Sinhalese. It has also added to the growth of Tamil nationalism in India, Malaysia, South Africa and Mauritius. In the recent past many violent attacks have taken place between the Sinhalese and some elements in the Tamil diaspora - for example in the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Germany and Australia.

Sri Lankan delegation consists of 100% Sinhalese

The Sri Lankan diplomatic service is a good example that shows how Tamils are side-lined including even those who are with the government. Today, how many Sri Lankan Ambassadors in foreign countries are Tamil? Where are the equal rights, and proportional allocation of posts that Sri Lanka speaks about to the world? The Sri Lankan delegation in Geneva which boasts much about equality and the **“search for a political solution”** for the Tamils in their international propaganda, has never had a single Tamil member in their delegation either in the UN Human Commission or in the present Council. The Sri Lankan delegation in UN Human Rights Forums always consists of 100% Sinhalese. ***This can always be verified in the UN records!***

In stark contrast to this, those members of Civil society who work on the human rights situation in Sri Lanka in UN Forums are Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims.

These are the realities. When anyone talks about realities in Sri Lanka – Sri Lankan propagandists and the racist media take revenge on those individuals. If any Tamils support the government's persecutory position, they become Ambassadors or Ministers.

It is a pity that all Sinhala rulers have proved that they are for *survival of their period in power and to fill the bank accounts of their kith and kin*, rather than for the benefit of the country.

Wild animals have better rights than Tamils

Past incidents have proved that in Sri Lanka, wild animals, for example elephants, have better rights than Tamils – sadly this is no exaggeration. In some newspapers in Sri Lanka, we see news items with photographs of police teams investigating the deaths of elephants which were killed by unknown gunmen. Whereas hundreds of Tamils are killed and assassinated, with no proper inquiry – in fact with impunity. Many Colombo newspapers do not publish any news of the killings which are suspected to have been carried out by the government forces and the members of the paramilitary.

The representatives of TCHR have always been targeted by the Sri Lankan government, its embassies, propagandists and the racist media in Colombo and abroad. Malicious propaganda has been frequently disseminated about us. All sort of news items have been published, several with a sinister hidden agenda, even going to the extent of saying that TCHR personnel were wanted by the Police in various countries! When we analyse those news items, the next possible Police force that they could mention would be from another planet, say **Moon or Mars**. We are proud to note that our “Pen” and “Tongue” – (our voice) are seriously worrying those criminals and human rights violators.

Indian factor

The Indian factor is very important at this juncture. India should not turn a blind eye to the following factors :

The November **1948 Citizenship Act** disenfranchised the Tamils of Indian origin in the hill country (plantation Tamils) and deprived them of selecting their representatives to the Parliament. This act rendered more than a million plantation Tamil workers stateless.

In 1964 - The Srimavo-Shashtri pact signed in 1964, repatriated Tamil people of Indian origin to India. They had lived in the island for over 115 years.

In 1971, during the India-Pakistan war, Sri Lanka allowed Pakistan's planes to fly via Colombo.

Due to a pact signed between India and Sri Lanka **in 1974**, the small Island "Kachchathivu" which was in conflict between the two countries was handed over to Sri Lanka.

In 1987, even though many Tamils did not accept the Indo-Lanka accord as a solution to the national ethnic question, it was however implemented forcefully, causing severe casualties to the Tamils inflicted by India, in the name of a solution to the conflict. This solution merged the Northern and Eastern provinces. But after exactly 18 years, the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka delivered its political judgement on 16 **October 2006**, stating that the merger of these two provinces was invalid.

When Rajiv Gandhi went to Sri Lanka to sign the Indo-Lanka accord, the most shameful incident for a State and a State Leader in the world occurred. On **30 July 1987**, when the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was inspecting the guard of honour given by the Sri Lankan Navy in Colombo, a Navy sailor struck Rajiv Gandhi forcefully with the butt of his unloaded gun attempting to assassinate him.

The then Prime Minister and the JVP were behind this assassination attempt and the Naval officer who attacked Rajiv Gandhi became a political hero in Sri Lanka. This sailor was later granted release under a general amnesty.

We hope that the citizens of India and the Indian government will not have so easily forgotten this attempted murder of their Prime Minister.

“Operation Poomalai”

When only a few hundred Tamils were displaced in the Jaffna peninsula on 3 June 1987, under a code name “*Operation Poomalai*”, Indian Air Force planes air dropped food items to the starving Tamils. This was not only a humanitarian gesture but also a message. But today, more than 200,000 Tamils are facing the worst humanitarian disaster and genocide in their homeland and India is not only refusing to help these people, it is openly assisting the Sri Lankan government in committing more violations against the Tamils.

If India really scrutinizes what is going on Sri Lanka, it will be clear that it has always been *used* by Sri Lanka for Sri Lanka's own benefit. This same policy was also practiced by Srimavo Bandaranayake in 1964 and then again in

1971 during the JVP uprising. In 1987 J. R. Jeyawardena did the same, and finally Mahinda Rajapaksa is doing the same now.

One should not forget that the Independence call of the people of Tamil Nadu came long before that of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. Also India should not ignore the democratic call of any of their citizens. Today the people of Tamil Nadu are being totally ignored by the Central government which appears to be fully in favour of the Genocide against the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

Use of Tamils as Pawns must be stopped

Does all this prove that Sri Lankan politicians are more ingenious than Indian politicians? Indian leaders need urgently to develop a long and durable view on the conflict in Sri Lanka. Otherwise, there will be another serious failure. The Human Rights and humanitarian situation of the Tamils is far worse than any other conflict in today's world. India which supports the Palestinians, the Tibetans and also some others indirectly, should open their eyes to the plight of the Tamils and help them.

Indian decision makers should realize that they would not have obtained their independence even today, if some powerful nations had supported the British.

The Sri Lankan war against the Tamils has left both children and adults with permanent physical and mental scars. The psychological state of both children and adults, is being affected by daily explosions, killings, abductions, threats, noise and turmoil. Stress sustained over a long period of time has traumatized many of them. They have been displaced from their homes for a very long time and the Childrens' education has been massively disrupted.

Therefore this is the right time for those who are **for** humanitarian intervention to openly demand that Sri Lanka declare an immediate ceasefire and that political negotiations are facilitated by those who believe they have the power to do. The continued use of Tamils as Pawns must be stopped and their inalienable rights should be respected.

Until recently the international community has listened attentively to Sri Lanka and has acted accordingly against the will of the Tamils. This has caused today's genocide of the Tamils.

Even though it is late, the international community has now realized that ***Sri Lanka has refused to listen to anyone.*** Therefore, we appeal to the international Community to act on Sri Lanka as they have acted in various parts of the world where genocide has taken place.