



General Assembly

Distr.: General
10 February 2020

English only

Human Rights Council

Forty-third session

24 February–20 March 2020

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Joint written statement* submitted by African Green Foundation International, International Buddhist Relief Organisation, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[31 January 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Reconciliation efforts and protection of Tamil Rights in Sri Lanka

The Sri Lanka has emerged from a nearly 30-year protracted terrorist conflict, with a reconciliation process ongoing. Sri Lanka is conscious of the manner in which racial, ethnic and other monolithic ideologies can be manipulated to their advantage by extremist elements and terrorist groups seeking to foster separatist agenda, discrimination and intolerance. Sri Lanka has taken measures to protect the human rights of all ethnic minorities including Tamils living in North and East. Most importantly 30% of Tamils are living in other parts of Sri Lanka. They are living in harmony with all other ethnic groups.

LTTE Sympathizers as an obstacle for reconciliation

Founded in 1976, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is a terrorist organization that seeks the creation of an independent homeland called "Tamil Eelam" for Sri Lanka's ethnic Tamil minority. Over the years, the LTTE has waged a violent secessionist campaign with the help of ground, air, and naval forces, as well as a dedicated suicide bomber wing. LTTE tactics have included full military operations, terror attacks against civilian centres, and political assassinations including those of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Ghandi and Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa. The LTTE also had an extensive network of fundraisers, political and propaganda officers, and arms procurers operating in Sri Lanka and within the Tamil diaspora. Although the LTTE was militarily defeated in May 2009, subversion, destabilization, and fundraising continues, particularly in the Tamil diaspora.

LTTE separatist groups are located in overseas promote hate among ethnic groups. It is a real obstacle for ethnic harmony in Sri Lanka. Most importantly none of the groups ever provided support Tamils in North and East. Further, none of them wanted to go back and live in the North or East. Their main intention is to create a dispute among the Tamils and other groups including the Sri Lanka government. This will benefit them to continue profitable human smuggling networks. It was reported that Tamil asylum seekers came to Canada by ships Ocean Lady and Sun Sea, each paid US\$ 20,000 to US\$ 30,000.00 to secure their passage. It is a usual business practice to claim refugee status in western countries and enjoy the western way of life at the cost of poor ethnic Tamils in North and East.

Tamil Rights protected

Sri Lanka has well established laws and practices to ensure that no citizen shall be discriminated against on the grounds of race, religion language, caste, sex, political opinion or any such grounds. Sri Lanka has also taken steps to address the manifold challenges in line with the National Plan of Action for the implementation of the recommendations of the Lesson Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) which seeks to promote inter-communal and inter-religious understanding in the reconciliation process, as well as to address grievances and grant redress to those who have been victims and whose rights have been violated on the grounds of ethnicity or religion.

The material placed before the LLRC covered a broad range of complex issues of a multidisciplinary nature, resulting in a need for the Commission to identify the issues which the Commission deemed necessary to deal with, in terms of the mandate and its stated objectives. There is no "Cookie Cutter" solution for ethnic question in Sri Lanka. All stake holders must work very closely to address the issues to find a sustainable solution. One of the major obstacles is poverty and lack of access to resources. Those are common challenges in most of the developing countries not only Tamils living in North and East.

A prominent Sri Lanka scholar Mr. *Bernard Jayathilake* has pointed out reasons for the Tamil uprising; frustrations due to inter alia economic stagnation, perceptions of discrimination due to the introduction of standardization in education/employment, non-implementation of language policy, devolution and the failure to confer a substantial degree of political autonomy to the Northern and Eastern Provinces to conduct their own affairs.

It was stated that even though successive administrations in post-independent Sri Lanka had attempted to find solutions to these problems as far back as early 1950, nothing durable was achieved due to divisive Tamil nationalist party politics and lack of a bipartisan approach to vital national issues.

Infrastructure development in North and East

Dr. Seeni Mohamed Aliff of the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka stated in his article “Reconciliation in Post-war Sri Lanka” the government of Sri Lanka made a substantive investment to improve connectivity across the North province. All major highways are being rehabilitated. Those include major roads, provincial roads and rural roads. The total investment for the road sector is Rs. 75,071 million. Three major bridges that were destroyed by the LTTE during the war. *Mannar Bridge*, *Sangupitty Bridge* and *Aruvi Aru Bridge* have been reconstructed with massive investment by the government. Rehabilitation of the Northern railway network has begun with US \$ 650 million loans under assistance from the government of India. This work has now been completed.

Rehabilitation of Ex-LTTE cadres

The Sri Lanka government sponsored the program rehabilitated nearly 12,000 Ex-LTTE cadres. The government has provided a new job opportunity to live peacefully with their family. The job opportunities help them to join civil society and back to their normal way of life. The government also ensured the welfare of nearly 300,000 Internally Displaced Persons, (IDPs). Demining, the reconstructions of infrastructure enhance the resettling process in North and East.

Tamils engagement in the political process

Further, after nearly two decades the government has granted the approval to form the Northern Provincial Council election in 2013. Tamil National Alliance (TNA) won the election. Justice C.V. Vikneswaran took oath as Chief Minister of the Northern Provincial Council.

Beginning of the year of 2015, through the victory of Presidential Election, Maithripala Sirisena took oath as the President of Sri Lanka on the 9th of January 2015. During the presidential election, TNA Supported Maithripala Sirisena. TNA leader R. Sampanthan was appointed as the opposition leader of Parliament. Sampanthan is the second Tamil politician since A. Amirthalingam to be appointed to the post of Opposition Leader in Sri Lanka. It is very vital for a symbol of making reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

Re-claimed Tamil heritage and their land in North and East

Under the full cooperation of Sri Lanka government hand over the land deeds to 234 war displaced families in *Sampur*. In 2011 over 818 acres of lands had been vested with the BOI by using a special gazette notification, but 2016 the lands returned it to the original owners.

Sri Lanka government handed over the deeds to 701 acres of land to 700 original land-owners during a ceremony held at *Nadeshvar* College in Jaffna. At the ceremony, organized by the Security Force Headquarters - Jaffna (SFHQ-J), the owners of 490.91 acres of land in *Kopai*, 210.07 acres in *Thelippalai* and separate 6.2 acres from Jaffna *Nadeshvar* College premises received the title deeds. Accordingly, 650 families in *Thelippalai* and 50 families in *Kopai* were endowed with their rights for their lands. Consequently, all lands in *Kopai* which were under the control of security forces have been released.

Tamil political leaders responsible

As stated on LLRC report, the Tamil political leaders were equally responsible for this conflict which could have been avoided had the Tamil leaders refrained from promoting an armed campaign towards secession, acquiescing in the violence and terrorist methods used by the LTTE against both the Sinhala and Tamil people, and failing to come out strongly and fearlessly against the LTTE, and their atrocious practices. Further reports state that a collective act of contrition for what happened would not come easily to either party. It would come only if they are ready to make a profound moral self-appraisal in the light of the human tragedy that has occurred.

Tamils are Sri Lankans

North and East Tamils are Sri Lankans, hardworking people contributing to the country's economy the same as everyone else in Sri Lanka. North and East Tamils are citizens of Sri Lanka and they have the right to live not only North and East. Tamils have legal rights to acquire land from any part of the country.

Conclusion

As stated on the LLRC, seeds of reconciliation can take root only if there are forgiveness and compassion. Leaders of all sides should reach out to each other in humility and make a joint declaration, extending an apology to innocent citizens who felt victim to this conflict, as a result of the collective failure of the political leadership on all sides to prevent such a conflict from emerging. Religious leaders and civil society should work towards it and emphasize the healing impact it would have on the entire process of reconciliation. This will create a pathway to find the best sustainable long-lasting solution for Sri Lankans by Sri Lankans.

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Global Srilankan Forum Excom, and Global Srilankan Forum United Kingdom NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.