



## **Issued for Immediate Release**

### **NEWS RELEASE – NEWS RELEASE – NEWS RELEASE**

#### **“Aspirations for Tamil Eelam should be upheld”**

**– Former Undersecretary of State**

On the day (16 January 2008) of unilateral and formal abrogation of the Cease Fire Agreement (CFA) and declaration of war against the Tamil people by the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL), over 13 Members of the UK Parliament and the European Parliament met Tamils in large numbers within the Parliament premises, to discuss the deteriorating situation in Sri Lanka.

Government's current and former Ministers, Member of European Parliament, President, Shadow Foreign Affairs Spokesman of the Liberal Democratic Party and Conservative Parliamentarians attended the meeting and spoke of their outrage and concern for the current and developing humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka.

This meeting, which was organised by the British Tamils Forum, chaired by Keith Vaz MP and was well attended by the Tamil community from all around the country. BTF spokesperson Mr. Suren Surendiran articulated the Tamil Community's anxiety, fear and sadness of continuing mass murder and the helplessness that the community feels for their loved ones back in Sri Lanka. He further drew parallels between the lack of political will that resulted in over a million Rwandans being slaughtered back in 1994, the continued sufferings of people from the Darfur Region in Sudan and over quarter of a million people who were murdered in Bosnia before the International Community reacted to stop these human sufferings. Mr. Surendiran posed the question to the panel as to whether this is the same what we want in our conscience regarding Sri Lanka?

He highlighted that Mugabe is violating human rights of his own people without any aid or assistance from the International Community. However, he said that the Rajapakse Government is abusing the Tamils fundamental human rights and killing innocent Tamil civilians with aid and assistance from the International Community.

Earlier, speaking to the audience Gareth R Thomas MP (Parliamentary undersecretary of state, Department for International Development) said that the Government regrets the decision of GOSL to walk away from the peace process and the cease fire agreement. He also stated that last year the Government suspended aid payments to Sri Lanka because of growing concerns of human rights abuses by government forces fighting Tamil rebels. Minister further said that “there must be vigorous debate within the United Nations and that's the only way. We must encourage the engagement of the UN”

Mark Todd – Labour Member of Parliament for South Derbyshire, said that the GOSL is extra ordinarily short sighted in its decision to pullout of the CFA and that there cannot be a military solution to this problem. He also said that “we will do everything we can to bring a peaceful solution to this problem”.

Dr. Raj Chandran a member of the Conservative Party said that he is not a supporter of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). However he said because of the LTTE that the Tamils today are able to walk with pride even when there are gross human rights violations carried out by the GOSL.

Baroness Sarah Ludford - Liberal Democratic Party MEP, who has many responsibilities including being the Vice-Chairwoman of the European Parliament's Human Rights Sub-Committee, speaking at the meeting condemned the GOSL for indiscriminately arresting Tamil civilians in Colombo and stated that there can be

# British Tamils Forum



no military solution to a political problem. The Baroness further suggested that the Sri Lankan economy had the potential to grow at least a further 2% than its reported growth, if not for the war.

Lee Scott – Conservative MP for Ilford North condemned the Government sponsored human rights violations in Sri Lanka.

Jeremy Corbyn – Labour MP for Islington North spoke with passion and straight from his heart. He suggested that most Tamils in Sri Lanka do not know the meaning of normal life due to the continued aggression by that country's authorities and Government. He said war is a failure of politics. The parliamentarian further stated "rights of Tamils to live in their own land and speak their own language is basic human rights"

Foreign Affairs Spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats Ed Davey MP, said that it is a big mistake of the GOSL to pullout of the CFA. He further said that the UK Government must endeavor in bringing peace to the island nation. He also said that as elected representatives of all the people he will defend everyone's freedom of speech and that he will be debating the human rights violations of GOSL with the Sri Lankan High Commissioner here in the UK.

Paddy Tipping MP for Sherwood said that he will always support the Tamil's cause and keep the Foreign Secretary David Miliband briefed at every opportunity he finds.

The President of the Liberal Democratic Party Simon Hughes MP said that it is a very sad day and that we are gathered here with heavy hearts due to the current and developing humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka. He said that a Government does its job properly only when it recognizes aspirations of its people. There cannot be a peaceful solution in Sri Lanka unless the President of the day and the Government of the day recognises the legitimate aspirations of the Tamils. He said just like in Northern Ireland peace can be achieved by negotiation. He further said that it is not new to have independent states, autonomies and even Governments within the same country. He drew parallels to The Great Britain where there are 4 different functioning Governments.

He pointed out of the debate that he has requested from the Speaker to discuss the current and deteriorating situation in Sri Lanka has been granted and that it will be held tomorrow afternoon in the main Chambers.

Other Members of Parliament who spoke at this meeting were Phyllis Starkey, Susan Kramer, Keith Vaz, Barry Gardiner and Virendra Sharma.

A series of requests in form of questions and answers were discussed. The following are a sample of suggestions that were discussed:

- ✚ Ban the Government of Sri Lanka from the Commonwealth
- ✚ UK Government to facilitate seamless supplies of essentials and medical supplies to the war affected North and East of Sri Lanka which is predominantly Tamil area.
- ✚ UN resolution sponsored by the UK condemning the abrogation of the CFA by the GOSL
- ✚ Europe wide arms embargo
- ✚ How best can the UK Government work closely with the Royal Norwegian Government to revive the peace process
- ✚ Importance of LTTE de-proscription

**- Ends -**

# British Tamils Forum

---



## **Media Contact:**

**Suren Surendiran Tel:** 07958 590 196

**Email:** [surensurendiran@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:surensurendiran@yahoo.co.uk)

## **Notes to Editors:**

**British Tamil's Forum** exists to harness the skills and the knowledge of the members of the forum, well-wishers and significant others including mainstream decision makers in the UK with the aim of alleviating the sufferings of the Tamils community in the Island of Sri Lanka and to further their right to self determination within a democratic frame work under pinned by international law, its covenants and conventions. The forum was set-up in 2006 when, with the support 88 British Tamil community organisations, it also published an open letter in the Times newspaper. For more information visit: [www.britishtamilsforum.org.uk](http://www.britishtamilsforum.org.uk)