



MR JOHN MURPHY - FEDERAL PARLIAMENT MEMBER FOR LOWE

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## Australian MP calls for Independent Tamil state in Sri Lanka

Mr MURPHY (Federal Member for Lowe) (10.48 p.m)

I rise tonight to speak about the plight of Tamils in the war-torn country of Sri Lanka. The Tamil community constitutes one of the most significant cultural entities in my electorate of Lowe. It is widely acknowledged that the Lowe electorate is the Tamil 'capital' of Australia. On 4 August 1998, the Sri Lankan government extended its state of emergency to the whole of the country. This measure was in force in the capital Colombo and in the north and east of Sri Lanka, where separatists belonging to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have been waging a bloody struggle for independence.

Today, the civilian Tamil population continues to be a target of military operations by the Sri Lankan armed forces. As a consequence, disappearances, extrajudicial killings, rape, torture, arbitrary arrest and Indefinite detention are continuing to occur regularly within the Sri Lankan army-occupied regions of the Tamil homeland. There are more than 825,000 displaced Tamil civilians living under appalling conditions that include acute shortages of water, food and medicine. In the northern Vanni region of the Tamil homeland there is an embargo of food and medicine in violation of humanitarian law.

At the present time we are hearing so much about the horror of war in Kosovo. Why are we not hearing about Sri Lanka's war? Because it is a hidden war due to the strong ties between the Sinhalese dominated Sri Lankan government and the major Western powers. Both scenarios depict a racially dominated military oppressing an ethnic minority. Both have resulted in massive displacements, sightings of mass graves and evidence of genocide. Both situations have resulted in two of the gravest disasters and crimes against humanity. Multiple massacres have occurred in townships in the east and north of Sri Lanka. An attempted democratic mandate proved by a 70 per cent vote by Tamils to separate from Sri Lanka in 1977 has been systematically denied.

I have the greatest respect for the Tamil community. They are perhaps one of the best organised ethnic communities in Australia. Since I was elected to this House in 1998 I have received representations from several Tamil organisations and individuals. These and other associations form an international network of Tamil community organisations seeking a peaceful solution to the ongoing bloodshed in Sri Lanka. What then is the solution to the 15-year civil war in Sri Lanka? In fulfillment of this drive towards a peaceful solution, the Tamil community is asking for a withdrawal of security forces from the occupied Tamil homeland, a lifting of the embargo on essential food and medicine and a political solution to the conflict with the Tamil people that would enable the Tamil people to choose their own political and national status.

The Tamil people call on Australia to assist them in their appeal for negotiations to take place under the auspices of a neutral third party acceptable to the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil leadership under the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. I strongly urge this parliament to support the independence of the Tamil people from the state of Sri Lanka. It is foolishness for us to ignore this 15-year bloody conflict that sees no end in sight because the Tamil and Sinhalese people cannot peacefully coexist under one government. Our immediate regional history has shown that Sri Lanka is one clear example where the demographic reality requires a separation of states.

The alternative to this course of action is for Australia to participate in the grave destabilising influence of Sri Lanka melting down into a further 15 years of protracted civil war that may threaten to further destabilise our immediate region. Like Kosovo, a political and peaceful solution to the conflict can be achieved only in the absence of ongoing armed conflict. The Tamil people cannot negotiate under the auspices of military oppression.

I call on the Australian government to take urgent action to press the Sri Lankan government to

- (1) withdraw its security forces from the occupied Tamil homeland;
- (2) lift the embargo of essential food and medicine;
- (3) seek a political solution to the conflict with the Tamil people that would enable them to choose their own political and national status; and
- (4) recognise the Tamil right to self-determination as stipulated in article 1 of the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which states : All people have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

I call for negotiations to take place and to be overseen by a third party acceptable to the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil leadership, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Australia has an obligation to play a role in bringing about a lasting and plausible peace for Sri Lanka and the achievement of a peaceful Tamil homeland - a dream shared by the million Tamils worldwide.