

**Speech by Mr. R. Sampanthan,  
MP, Trincomalee District, Sri Lanka  
Parliamentary Group Leader, Tamil National Alliance (TNA)<sup>1</sup>  
November 14, 2008 in the Sri Lanka Parliament**

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [ ]

We see the prosecution of this war, this ruthless war, as the fulcrum on which the whole institution of Government revolves. The Tamil question has afflicted the body politic of this country since Independence, primarily because the peoples that inhabit this country - the Sinhalese people, the Tamil people and the Muslim people - have not been able to give themselves a Constitution based upon the consensus of all its peoples. Efforts to evolve a solution to the Tamil question have not been successful



primarily because the two main political parties, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the United National Party, have not been able to adopt a bipartisan consensual approach. President Mahinda Rajapaksa and his key advisers seem, however, to think that there has to be a military solution to the Tamil question. That, in my submission, is the objective of this war.

This objective is packaged in four concepts. [ ] The Government's new discovery for the resolution of the intractable Tamil question, which in effect is the right of the Tamil-speaking people to self-determination in the areas of their historical habitation, is based upon the following four concepts: one, demilitarization; two, democratization; three, development and four, devolution.

Militarization in this country, Sir, is in two forms. One is the State military. The Sri Lankan State has got its Army, its Navy and its Air Force. There is a retaliatory or a defensive armed force of the LTTE, which has also got its own army, its own navy and its own air force. President Mahinda Rajapaksa states that the violence of the LTTE must be militarily crushed; there is no other way.

**Non-violent protest met with state violence**

I want to pose the question, Sir, as to when violence was first unleashed in this country, when violence first commenced in this country? Is it not true that violence was unleashed against the Tamil people in the 1950s, in the 1960s, in the 1970s and in the 1980s? Why? They merely carried on a non-violent political struggle. You were not prepared to accommodate their moderate political demands and you unleashed violence against them. They performed *Sathyagraha* on the Gandhian model of non-violence. In 1956, when their leaders performed a *Sathyagraha* at Galle Face Green, in front of the old Parliament House, they were attacked. You subjected the Tamil people to violence because you wanted to subdue them and subjugate them. The Tamil people, however, have proved that they are too resilient for you to succeed in your efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> The TNA won 22 of the 23 Tamil seats available in the North East in the last elections and represent the democratic wishes of the Tamil people.

The emergence of the LTTE was in the late 1970s; after three decades, this was the reaction to the Government's violent and unjust actions against the Tamil people. You now try to make out that the LTTE is the only problem, that the LTTE is purely a terrorist organization, and that there was no justification for its emergence.

This I submit, Sir, is nothing but, downright chicanery. You conveniently forget that in more than half of Sri Lanka's post-independence history, in more than the first three decades since the country attained independence, only the Tamil people were the victims of violence and that the Sri Lankan State was the offender.

### **No political solution, only a military one**

Politically, no acceptable solution has yet been evolved to the Tamil question. You are not willing to do so because you do not want to compromise on Sinhala supremacy. The Government [ ] stages the drama of an APRC process and also claims in the interim to implement the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment<sup>2</sup> to the Constitution, something which the President wanted done because he wanted something with which he could try to appease the international community. [ ] This is yet another grave betrayal in the long list of betrayals committed by the Sri Lankan State against the Tamil people; you try to make out that you want to solve this problem, that you are honest about it, that your political proposals are intended genuinely to find a solution, but you are de-merging the North-East and not coming up with any worthwhile political proposal.

I propose at this stage Sir, with your permission to read out an interview given by Hon. Mangala Samaraweera, who was the former Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Government [ ]:

*“The Indian Prime Minister was reportedly assured by the government even during your tenure as foreign minister that a political package to resolve the ethnic issue will be submitted at the earliest but still there is no progress on that front. How serious has this development impacted on Indo-Lanka relations?”*

“As you know, as foreign minister between the period of November 2005 and January 2007, I made six visits to New Delhi - twice with the President. At each opportunity, I had the honour of meeting the Indian Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh to explain the evolving situation in the country. Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee also

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<sup>2</sup> The 13th Amendment to the Constitution was passed after the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord. The Accord recognizes the Northern and Eastern Provinces as the historical homeland of the Tamil-speaking people of the island, merges the two provinces to be ratified by a referendum (which has never been held), devolves certain subjects to the provincial councils, others to be concurrent and still others to be reserved for the center. It also recognizes Sinhalese and Tamil as national languages.

The Sri Lankan system of provincial councils is a result of this amendment. They were established in all provinces other than the North and the East until 2008, when a disputed election was held in the East. Provincial Councils were added to the Accord in an attempt to provide a measure of self-government to the Tamils, which has not been successful. Last year a pliant Supreme Court, under pressure from the current government, undid the merger of the North and East. The equality provided to the Tamil language is observed only in its breach. Most powers which should come under the provincial councils have not yet been devolved, e.g. law and order, land, education.

participated at these meetings. In fact, at each meeting, first the President and then I assured the Prime Minister that the final report of the All Party Conference (APC) will be issued by August 2006, the latest.”

That was two years ago. He further goes on to say, I quote:

At the Non Aligned Summit in Havana in September 2006, President Rajapakse again assured the Indian Prime Minister and the delegation that there would be no de-merger of the north and east.” (*Sunday Leader*, Aug. 3, 2008)

Are you not cheating everybody, the people in this country, the international community and the much beleaguered Tamil people? In so far, Sir, as the sharing of powers of Government is concerned, the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment was rejected by the main Tamil political party of the Tamil people, the TULF as early as 1987 – 1988, and continues to be rejected by the main Tamil political party, the Tamil National Alliance, which has 22 Members in Parliament out of 23 Tamil Members of Parliament elected from the North and the East. It has not found acceptance with any Tamil political formation that does not carry out the dictates of President Mahinda Rajapaksa. [ ] The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment concentrates all powers in the Centre and the Provincial Council is no more than a glorified local government institution. Such a worthless scheme can never be a solution to the Tamil question.

I am told that the media today have reported that the Hon. Susil Premajayantha in Parliament yesterday said that there will be no solution above the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment. If that is your position, I might tell you across the Floor of this House, you can chuck it; we will not touch it with the wrong end of a barge-pole.

### **Military attacks to break the will of the Tamil people**

It is in this background, Sir, that this so-called demilitarization, which in effect means the military annihilation of the LTTE, takes place. In doing so, Tamil civilian settlements are subjected to aerial bombardment, multi-barrel rocket launcher fire and other military attacks. Tamil civilians are killed and injured. Their assets, including their livelihood opportunities and equipment, are destroyed. They are displaced in hundreds of thousands. Entire villages are depopulated and denuded in a manner tantamount to ethnic cleansing. As a step complementary to the conduct of this war, Tamil civilians, particularly youth, are subjected to enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. The killings of five Tamil students in Trincomalee Town, and 17 Tamil aid workers in Mutur, Trincomalee, were two such clearly outrageous instances [ ].

We state that by this process of so-called demilitarization, genocidal attacks have been unleashed against the Tamil people in their areas of historical habitation, their homeland. These ruthless military attacks have objectives that go beyond the so-called annihilation of the LTTE. The Sri Lankan Government surely knows that the LTTE cannot be annihilated by aerial bombing of Tamil settlements and firing multi-barrel rockets into such settlements.

The real objective is to break the will of the Tamils as a people, to break their resilience and to subdue and to subjugate those who remain. I would even mention, Sir, that when the Government sought the immediate withdrawal of UN agencies and the international

non-governmental organizations from the Vanni, some time in September, when those agencies were prepared to work there continuously, this was deliberately done by the Government in order to inflict further hardships on the Tamil people and as a component of the process of committing genocide against the Tamil people.

### **Military occupation of the Tamil homeland**

In this process of demilitarization, valuable lands of Tamil civilian people, both in the North and the East, in Walikamam, in Thenmarachchi, in Vadamarachchi, in Kayts, in Mutur East which they have historically inhabited and used for their residence and occupational purposes for centuries, have been militarily taken over by the Sri Lankan State without the consent of these Tamil civilians, and many hundreds of thousands of Tamil people are deprived of the use of such lands for occupation and for residence, reducing them to a position of destitution and penury. The Sri Lankan Armed forces are increasingly occupying the areas historically inhabited by the Tamil people, both in the North and in the East, establishing new camps and new facilities wherever they please, and the Tamil people who remain in these areas will have to live under the oppressive control of these armed forces, who are 99 per cent Sinhala, and who have nothing but hostility against the Tamil people.

This, Sir, I submit is the most suppressive subjugation of the Tamil nation that has been inflicted on them by this Government. This cruel action, Sir, against the Tamil people is ironically and most cynically described as the 'liberation' of the Tamil people by the Mahinda Rajapaksa Government. Tamil people are killed; they are grievously injured; their houses and other assets, plantations, crops, animal husbandry, occupational equipment, everything, is destroyed; they are driven out of their homes and villages; they are impoverished, rendered destitute; they seek refuge with their children in the open even under trees, and the Government has the audacity to say that these Tamil people are being liberated. The Government's mendacious conduct, Sir, in regard to what is happening can be seen from what happened in the Eastern Province.

There was a debate in Parliament in regard to the situation in the North-East on 5th of September, 2007, in the course of which, quoting the reports of recognized human rights organizations, the University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna), and the Human Rights Watch, I stated that at least 300 Tamil civilians had been killed in the course of military operations in the Eastern Province, and the Minister who replied on behalf of the Government said that he had checked with the Government Agents of Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Amparai, and the Area Commanders of the Army, in those areas, and that not one Tamil civilian had been killed. I subsequently got the names of these people and [ ] I tabled the names of 261 Tamil persons who had been killed, their addresses and the dates on which they were killed, and I called upon the Government to appoint a Commission of Inquiry comprising three retired judges of the higher judiciary, one Sinhalese, one Tamil and one Muslim with the Muslim as the Chairman of the Commission, to go into this question, inquire and give us a report in regard to the truth. Have you done that? Why not? You go around saying, "Tamils are not being killed; we are liberating them." [ ]

## **Will still be fighting 'terrorism' in 30 years**

I remember, when I was a Member of Parliament in 1977/1978 in the old Parliament, President J.R. Jayewardene one day stood up and said that he had instructed his nephew, Brigadier "Bull" Weeratunga to go to Jaffna and to put an end to terrorism. That happened 30 years ago. And we all know what has happened since.

I wish to say that, unless one of three things happen,: Firstly, you destroy the Tamil nation - you are able to commit genocide of the Tamil nation, which is what you are in the process of doing now; Secondly, there is an acceptable political solution which is increasingly becoming remote from what is happening in this country; Thirdly, the Tamil-speaking people and others living with them are living in their own independent state, it is my submission, that you will still be fighting terrorism for yet another 30 years down the road. President J.R. Jayewardene said this 30 years ago and 30 years further down the road you will still be fighting terrorism.

I might at this stage refer to what was stated in regard to a similar situation by the late Prime Minister of India, Shrimathi Indira Gandhi when she referred to the Bangladesh situation in a letter that she wrote to the President of the United States, President Richard Nixon on the 15th of December 1971. This is what Prime Minister Indira Gandhi said:

"The fact of the matter is that the rulers of West Pakistan got away with the impression that they could do what they liked, because no one, not even the United States, would choose to take a public position that while Pakistan's integrity was certainly sacrosanct, human rights, liberty were no less so, and that there was a necessary inter-connection between the inviolability of states and the contentment of their people."

Exactly the same situation prevails in Sri Lanka today, where the human rights of the Tamil people, the liberty of the Tamil people, is under attack by the State in a genocidal process and the Sri Lankan Government, under President Mahinda Rajapaksa, thinks that they can get away with all these things, and nobody can question them, nobody can control them, and nobody can set things right. I must say, you are making a very, very sad mistake.

## **The inviolability of states and the contentment of their people**

Sir, I want to refer to the Indian concerns that were expressed in recent times. They are contained in the three communiqués that I hope to place before the House. The first was on October 6th, a demarche referred to by an official who said, I quote:

"The Sri Lankan Deputy High Commissioner was summoned by the National Security Adviser today to express India's grave concern and unhappiness at the growing casualties of unarmed Tamil civilians as a result of military action. The escalation of hostilities in the North and the resultant fallout was leading to a great deal of concern in India. It was pointed out that there was need for the Sri Lankan government to act with greater restraint and address the growing feeling of insecurity among the minority community. To stem the deteriorating humanitarian situation, the need to revive the political process was highlighted. It was essential that vital supplies to the affected population were not disrupted in any manner."

This was after you withdrew the UN agencies and the international NGOs from the Vanni.

Sir, the second statement that came out is from the Indian Foreign Minister, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee. I quote from an article in *The Hindu* of 17th October, 2008, under the heading, "India worried about civilian suffering, says Pranab":

“It is essential that their rights [of Tamil civilians] be respected, that they be immune from attacks, and that food and other essential supplies be allowed to reach them,” External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee said in a statement here. Mr. Mukherjee said New Delhi had consistently made it clear that normality could not be brought about by military means or battlefield victories. What was required was a peacefully negotiated political settlement which allowed each community to realise its potential within the framework of a united Sri Lanka. The Government of India, he stressed, would do all in its power to achieve this goal to ameliorate the humanitarian conditions in Sri Lanka and had been making representations to Colombo at several levels.”

There was a third statement, Sir, which came out from the Foreign Secretary. “He expressed grave concern over the situation obtaining in Sri Lanka”. He expressed worries at the humanitarian effect of the conflict on the civilians and said essential supplies and food should be allowed to reach them. The Foreign Secretary also reiterated that a political settlement is required and this could not be brought about by military means. He also asked the High Commissioner for Sri Lanka in India to tell his Government that urgent steps be taken to address India’s concerns.

What is happening Sir? We all know that after all these concerns, Mr. Basil Rajapaksa, as the Special Envoy of the President, went to India. He was there on the 26th of October and he made certain representations and gave assurances to India that the Tamil people will not be penalised or will not be victimized during the course of the military operations and that the Government would ensure that the Tamil civilians were safe. I will, Sir, place here, a record of the events that took place in the Wannai on 24th of October, that is two days before Mr. Basil Rajapaksa went to India, 25th of October, 28th of October, 29th of October, 30th of October, again 30th of October, 31st of October, 2nd of November, 3rd of November, again 3rd of November, 6th of November, 9th of November and 10th of November, where, as the result of aerial bombardment and multi-barrel rocket attacks, civilians have been killed; civilians have been injured; schools have been damaged; houses have been damaged - some completely and some partially; temples have been damaged, even the Kilinochchi Hospital was damaged. [ ]

So, Sir, if this Government thinks that by merely prosecuting this war, they can find a solution to the Tamil question, I think, they are sadly mistaken and I would strongly urge them to rethink their whole strategy.

### **National interest & destruction of the Tamils**

At this stage, Sir, while we talk about the war and all that has been going on, I want to read, Sir, an article that appeared in TIME magazine of 3rd of November, 2008 where Mr. Barack Obama, the new President of the United States, as the Democratic candidate met with General Petraeus, the Military Commander of the US, in regard to the war in Iraq. [ ]:

“Your job is to succeed in Iraq on as favourable terms as we can get. But my job as a potential Commander in Chief is to view your counsel and interests through the prism of our overall national security.” Obama talked about the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, the financial costs of the occupation of Iraq, the stress it was putting on the military.”

Do you think of your national interest? Are you not alienating the Tamil people in such a way that the Tamil people can never be integrated hereafter, into a Sri Lankan nation, by killing them in this way, by injuring them in this way, by destroying all that they own? You do not think of that; you are not concerned about it. [ ]

Mr. Obama also spoke on the Sri Lankan Tamil issue during the course of the Presidential campaign and I quote his own words. It states, I quote:

“... characterizing the conflict in Sri Lanka as a ‘vicious civil war’, Senator Barack Obama, a leading Democratic contender in America’s forthcoming 2008 Presidential elections, said during an interview that, ‘the problem of the 21st century is the problem of the other’. He described this phenomenon as the inability of the people to accommodate others ‘who are not like us’, and mentioned Sri Lanka as an example,....”

Who does not accommodate whom in this country?

Obama continued “...pointing out that the war rages even when ‘everybody there looks exactly the same.’ ”

Obama also criticized the Bush administration’s “war on terror” as the cause for suppressing civil liberties, saying: “Part of my job as next President is to break the fever of fear that has been exploited by this administration. We are told to be afraid of terrorists, immigrants and each other. This becomes the means by which our civil liberties are being subverted and our values are distorted,” implying policy changes are in order.

He promised a break from the Bush-Cheney diplomacy: “a willingness to speak to our adversaries” and cited President Kennedy, saying “We should never negotiate out of fear, but we should never fear to negotiate.”

“The notion that not talking with Leaders we do not like makes us look tough, is fundamentally flawed, it makes us look arrogant and sends the message to the world that we are not listening.”

I am concluding, Sir. In fact the impression that we all have is, whatever we say in this House you are not listening. You do not care two hoots. You do what you like. But please do not think that you can do what you like and get away with it. That must come to an end. That will come to an end. That will be brought to an end. You cannot go on like this indefinitely. [ ]

## **TNA Urgent Press Release**

by the Parliamentary Group, Tamil National Alliance, January 22, 2009

### **TNA CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE CEASEFIRE AND TALKS**

The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) wishes to bring to the urgent attention of the international community the current dire situation facing the Tamil civilian population in Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)-administered areas. Currently, there are over 360,000 IDPs out of a total population of nearly 500,000 people in LTTE-controlled areas. This entire population is living within an area of about 400 square kilometers.

In addition to ordering all United Nations and other humanitarian NGOs out of LTTE-administered areas since September 2008, the Sri Lankan State has also imposed stringent economic, medical and food embargoes resulting in the severe lack of basic items required by the civilians.

In addition to this already critical condition, due to the targeted bombing campaigns by the Sri Lankan Armed Forces on IDP camps and other public buildings that could provide shelter, IDPs have been forced to seek refuge under trees, on the roads, and even in the jungles to avoid being killed. Most of these areas are flooded due to the recent monsoon rains.

Tamil civilians, including children and infants, have been killed or grievously injured in substantial numbers. Their houses, farms crops and plantations have been destroyed. Their means of livelihood have been destroyed and they have been rendered destitute. In the last 20 days alone 66 civilians have been killed and 263 civilians have been grievously injured.

This military campaign is taking place whilst the Sri Lankan State has been unwilling to take any meaningful steps in keeping with the mandates given by the overwhelming majority of the Tamil people to the TNA at the last two consecutive general elections. This only demonstrates that the Sri Lankan State is not committed to an acceptable political solution to the Tamil National Question. This further demonstrates the reality that the Sri Lankan State is only committed to a military solution.

It is the considered view of the TNA that the Sri Lankan State is prosecuting the current war in pursuit of an ideology, namely the assertion of Sinhala Buddhist supremacist nationalism, and in order to achieve that objective a process of Genocide of the Tamil people is in progress. The inhuman conditions and the daily killings to which the Tamil civilians in LTTE-controlled areas are being subjected to are only the more obvious elements of this process.

Under these circumstances the TNA urgently appeals to the international community to prevail upon the Sri Lankan State to bring the war to an immediate end. The TNA also calls upon the international community to use its good offices to bring the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE to the negotiating table.

***Sangam!***

**Association of Sri Lankan Tamils in the USA**

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January, 2009