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PRESS RELEASE

Tamil American Diaspora Groups Meet with US-State Department on Sri Lanka Crisis

Washington, DC: Americans for Peace in Sri Lanka (APSL), a US based human rights activist group, led a delegation of 11 Tamil American organizations for a meeting at the United States Department of State with Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher and US Ambassador to Sri Lanka Robert Blake. The meeting to discuss the current humanitarian crisis Tamils face in Sri Lanka took place on April 08th in Washington, DC, with Ambassador Blake joining by video conferencing.

Assistant Secretary Boucher referred to the heightened anxiety of the Tamil Americans over the plight of their loved ones in the Tamil homeland, and expressed solidarity with them in this difficult time. The discussion was divided into two parts, humanitarian situation, led by Ambassador Blake, and views on political solution, led by Assistant Secretary Boucher. The APSL team gave its own presentation under both topics. Tamil Americans thanked Secretary of State Clinton for her call for a ceasefire and phoning Sri Lankan President Rajapaksa to halt directing fire into the “no-fire zone”. They noted that Secretary Clinton’s call was not heeded by the Colombo government.

Ambassador Blake gave an update on the US led efforts to care for the 120 – 150,000 Tamil civilians in the “safe zone,” which included 60% of the food aid going through the World Food Program, and evacuation of more than 4,000 wounded civilians. He spoke of continuing problems with medical aid and gave an update on the visit by UN Secretary General’s special representative for the internally displaced, Walter Kaelin, who has extracted concessions from the GoSL in the administration of the IDP camps in Vavuniya. APSL pointed out the real figure of encircled civilians in the “safe zone” is 330,000 as given by the additional government agent of the district. Tamil Americans asked for the support of the US administration to obtain clearance to any Diaspora initiative to take direct medical aid to the crisis zone.

Ambassador Blake informed that the government of Sri Lanka now plans to resettle 80% of the IDPs within one year, and after clearing mines. Tamil Americans cautioned that the over emphasis of mine clearing operations can be a ruse by Sri Lanka to delay the resettlement while they engage on creating high security zones and colonization of Sinhalese in the Vanni area.

APSL made an urgent plea to Ambassador Blake and Secretary Boucher to check on reports over the weekend that the Sri Lankan military has used chemical weapons killing hundreds of civilians and combatants. The news of the possession of internationally banned chemical weapons in the

hands of the Lankan forces has created alarm among the Tamil Diaspora that the Colombo government could engage in mass killings in the “safe zone” with intent of a genocidal outcome.

Tamil Americans continued to press for an immediate ceasefire. Ambassador Blake asked the Tamil Americans whether they can ask the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to let the Tamil civilians leave. APSL responded that the Tamil civilians are given a Hobson’s choice, and appealed for expanding the current safety zone and creating a demilitarized zone under the protection of the UN agencies. Only then the Tamil civilians can be asked to choose between staying with the LTTE, or leave for protected zone or distant IDP camps.

Assistant Secretary Boucher then emphasized need for a political solution to end the conflict. Tamil representatives pointed out that no durable political solution is possible without the participation of the LTTE. Tamil Americans opined that negotiations should not preclude separation as a solution, and that confederation with power sharing at the center may be a viable alternative to total separation. Ambassador Blake stated that a viable political solution is one that the Tamils would be willing to accept, and appealed to the Tamil Diaspora to take part in such political discourse.

Several senior high ranking officials from the State Dept and from the office of the United States’ Ambassador to the UN, Dr. Susan Rice were also present during the discussions.

The following US Diaspora groups were represented in the meeting: Americans for Peace in Sri Lanka, Federation of Tamil Associations of North America, HELP Advocates Sri Lanka, Ilankai Tamil Sangam, North Carolinians For Peace, People for Equality and Relief in Lanka, Tamils Against Genocide, Tamils of California, Tamils of New England, Tamils of Ohio, and World Thamil Organization - USA.

About APSL: Americans for Peace in Sri Lanka is a not-for-profit activist group of Tamil and non-Tamil Americans striving to bring durable peace to all peoples in Sri Lanka.

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