

Transcript of the Speech at the UN rally

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Brothers and sisters, we are here to answer the call of history. We are here to answer the answer the call of humanity. We are here to awaken the conscience of the international community.

Presently, more than 300,000 Tamil civilians have been internally displaced by the GoSL, that is dominated permanently and overwhelmingly by the Sinhala nation. Presently, the Tamil people in the Vanni area are subject to indiscriminate bombing and shelling solely on account of their Tamil ethnicity-- a genocidal act that shocks the conscience of mankind. In September 2008, the GoSL expelled the INGOs, who had been providing food, shelter and medicine to the Tamil areas. This is a calculated effort on the part of the GoSL to bring about the physical destruction of the Tamil nation, in whole or in part—a Genocidal Act. A couple of weeks ago we also learned from credible local sources that the GoSL employed chemical weapons against combatants' as well as against noncombatants.

In order to ascertain the intent of the GoSL's military onslaught, the GoSL's present military response should be compared with her response in the 1970s when the Sinhala youths took up arms. When the Sinhala youths took up arms, the GoSL did not engage in indiscriminate bombing or shelling. When the Sinhala youths took up arms, the GoSL did not ask the Sinhala villagers to leave their habitat and livelihood, and did not herd them into concentration camps. The glaring disparity demonstrates that the intent of the GoSL is to destroy the Tamil Nation, in whole or in part.

In addition, the press statements by the Defense Secretary and the Army Commander that Sri Lanka is a Sinhala nation and Tamil nationalism — not the Tigers — are the problem demonstrate that the intent of the GoSL is to engage in genocide. It is also brought to the attention of the International Community again, that when 8,000 Muslim were massacred in Srebrenica on account of their ethnicity, the International Court of Justice held that that fact constitutes genocide.

On December 9, 2008, the New-York Based Genocide Prevention Project issued a red alert against eight countries where genocide is happening or is likely to happen. Needless to say, Sri Lanka was one of those countries. On February 4, 2009, the UK Foreign Minister, Hon. David Milliband endorsed a view of a Member of the House of Commons that the signals coming from Sri Lanka indicate that the government is prepared to go ahead with an act of genocide. Along this line, 38 members of the US Congress sent a letter to Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton stating that there can be no doubt that ethnic-based violence is widespread in Sri Lanka, and that Tamil non-combatants are deliberately victimized by the GoSL. What's happening in Sri Lanka is not a civil war, it's not a war on terror, but an act of genocide, pure and simple.

This ultimate crime, which the GoSL is brazenly committing against our brethren back home, compels us to come out on their behalf. For the last two months, the Tamil Diaspora around the world in one voice has taken the Tamil genocide to the streets of the capitals of various countries. Being outside the clutches of the genocidal GoSL, we are in a unique position to contribute to halt this genocide. Being members of the political communities in various countries, we are also in a position to influence the foreign policy of our respective countries. In other situations, such as the overthrow of the Marcos regime in the Philippines and the successful completion of the nuclear deal between the US and India, their diasporas played a pivotal role.

Through our Awareness rallies with Tamil Eelam flags and pictures of the Tamil national leader, Hon. Vellupillai Pirabakaran, we have demonstrated to the GoSL that their zeal to quell the Tamils' thirst for the realization of the right to self-determination or their dream of wiping out the LTTE will be a futile one. The more they bomb, the more the Tamil diaspora is resolved to protect their brethren. The more they shell, the more the Tamils are resolved to realize their right of self-determination. The more they brag about their military adventurism, the more the Tamil people rally under the leadership of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

Our efforts, our rallies, are starting to have a creeping influence on the international community. For the international community's muted call for a ceasefire or for its call for a "humanitarian pause," the determination, the sacrifice, the passion, the unity demonstrated by the Tamil diaspora has played a significant role. However, we have not seen the light at the end of the tunnel yet. We have to continue to perform our moral obligation in a peaceful and sustained manner until a ceasefire is enforced and a process for political resolution is initiated.

We have gathered here today in front of the U.N. to ensure that the U.N. doesn't repeat the Rwanda genocide in the island of Sri Lanka. We have gathered here today in front of the U.N., so that another Srebrenica doesn't take place in the island of Sri Lanka. We have come in front of the U.N. in thousands because we still believe that the U.N. is not only a club of states, but also a temple of justice. We have come here today in the belief that even though the U.N. can be paralyzed in terms of taking tangible action, it still has the moral courage to speak the truth.

However, the U.N.'s response has been shameful to the current crisis on the island of Sri Lanka. The U.N.'s answers to the GoSL's genocide of Tamils are ethnic cleansing and concentration camps. Rather than sanctioning or calling for the GoSL to immediately stop the genocide, the U.N. Secretary General's office's response is to uproot the people from their areas of habitation and livelihood and to place them in internment camps under the control of the GoSL's mono-ethnic armed forces. The Secretary General's office attempts to justify this abuse on the grounds that they are acting in accordance with humanitarian laws. We respectfully point out the Secretary General is wrong in his reading of humanitarian law. Article 21 of the Guiding Principles of Internal Displacement mandates that "prior to any decision requiring displacement, all feasible

attention should be employed in order to avoid displacement altogether.” We are here to say that a ceasefire is the feasible alternative.

The U.N. was able to bring about a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas within 22 days. Why can't the U.N. bring about a similar ceasefire on the island of Sri Lanka? Why this double standard? Are Tamils children of a lesser god? When the Bashir expelled the international NGOs from Darfur, the U.N. issued warnings. But when the GoSL orders international NGOs to leave, they meekly left the Tamil areas the next day. Why this double standard? Are Tamils children of a lesser god? While the U.N. brought the issue of Darfur to the Security Council, it refused to do so in connection with the genocide of Tamils. Why this double standard? Are Tamils children of a lesser god?

The U.N.'s double standard is not only appalling, but also undermines the integrity of the U.N. itself.

We have been told that the GoSL will not agree to a ceasefire. It is hard to believe that if the international community could stand up to Saddam Hussein and enforce a no-fly zone and safe haven to protect the Kurds, that it does not have the moral courage to stand up to the GoSL, a tiny fascist. It is hard to believe that if the international community could stand up to Milosevic, that it does not have the moral conviction to confront the evil in the island of Sri Lanka. The U.N.'s inhumanitarian inaction raises the question whether there is U.N. acquiescence for a military solution to the Tamil national question.

We are told that since the LTTE is a “terrorist” organization, the GoSL's military offensive is legal. If that is so, what about the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, which is also designated as a “terrorist organization.” Such a statement also raises the question whether the international community is willing to accept Genocide as collateral damage in its “war on terror.” If that is so, they should say so openly. But we know that they won't because international law, specifically Article 1 of the Genocide Convention, prohibits genocide not only in time of peace but also in times of war.

The GoSL's alibi that its military onslaught is part of its war on terror raises the issue of the designation of the LTTE as a “terrorist organization.” This is not the time or the forum to dwell on the issue of whether the designation of the LTTE as a terrorist organization is legal in terms of international law or morality. However, it is a time to take stock and analyze what the designation of the LTTE as a terrorist organization has achieved. Has it reduced the loss of innocent lives? Has it contributed to the peace process? Has it contributed to create a single polity that upholds liberal values and where both the Sinhalese and Tamils feel that they are legitimate stakeholders? The answer to the above questions is a big NO.

As the *Christian Science Monitor* aptly stated, the “war on terror” policy emboldened the GoSL. The designation disrupts the balance of power, the power equilibrium that functioned as a deterrent, and now enables the GoSL to engage in a military onslaught. The GoSL's military onslaught not only shrinks the conflict area, but also shrinks the political space for any kind of reconciliation between the Sinhalese and Tamils. In the

future, when historians and jurists make an objective study of the current situation, they will find that the designation of the LTTE as a terrorist organization contributed to Genocide. They will also find Tamil blood not only on the hands of the GoSL, but on the hands of the International Community.

The ongoing genocide, coupled with the international community's inhumanitarian inaction, reinforce the Tamils belief, expressed through the 1977 General Elections, based on the International Law concept of self-preservation, that the Tamils very physical survival can only be guaranteed in an independent state.

We call upon the international community to act immediately and put an end to the Genocide. An unconditional permanent ceasefire is a first step in that direction.