

Memorandum Submitted to Members of US Congress by: Tamil Americans and Friends of Tamils

at the Peace Rally in Washington D.C.

July 23, 2007

We, the undersigned, have gathered today to rally for peace and an end to human rights abuses in war-ravaged Sri Lanka and to support the Tamil people's right to self-determination in pursuit of a lasting peace on the island.

Over the past two years, under the leadership of President Mahinda Rajapakse, violence in Sri Lanka has been on the rise with the 2002 ceasefire agreement between the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam effectively abandoned. As reported in Amnesty International's 2006 report, "The human rights situation in Sri Lanka deteriorated dramatically. Unlawful killings, recruitment of child soldiers, abductions, enforced disappearances and other human rights violations and war crimes increased..."

According to the United Nations Human Rights Council, three million citizens have been affected, 500,000 forced out of their homes and over 4,000 killed in the past 12 months. The toll has added to the 100,000 deaths, mostly Tamil civilians, in more than two decades of sectarian strife. Massive military operations in the Tamil homeland in the North and East of Sri Lanka have displaced half a million war and tsunami devastated Tamil civilians who have been left to suffer in refugee camps, most of which are in deplorable condition due to lack of food, water, sanitation, medical care, schooling, and adequate shelter.

Human rights watchdogs and international leaders have spoken out against the government's increasing brutality as it engages in crimes against humanity including, "directing artillery fire at military targets and civilians without discrimination, firing artillery from populated areas, summarily executing persons, and unnecessarily preventing the delivery of humanitarian aid" (Brad Abrams, HRW, April 16, 2007).

In August 2006, the government of Sri Lanka closed the A-9 highway, the only land route linking the Northern Jaffna peninsula with the rest of the island. Almost one year later, approximately 400,000 Tamil civilians remain trapped in this region, where they continue to be denied food, medicine and humanitarian aid. In a further display of discrimination and oppression against Tamils, the UN reports that Tamil regions have received 20 percent less tsunami aid than other areas, despite having suffered 65 percent of the tsunami destruction. As little as 29 percent of the required permanent houses have been completed in the war-torn Tamil regions, compared to 98 percent in the south.

Last month, the situation took an even more alarming turn as the government stepped up its efforts to purge Tamil civilians from the capital city of Colombo in what amounts to no less than ethnic cleansing. “The forced eviction of 375 Tamils from the capital of Colombo ... carried out by police and soldiers in a nighttime raid on areas of Colombo populated by the Tamil ethnic minority, was the latest chapter in the brutal civil war,” reports The New York Times.

In the past year, more journalists and aid workers were killed with government complicity in Sri Lanka than anywhere else in the world. Throughout this time U.S. military aid has increased, despite the government’s abominable record of human rights violations. The suffering of the innocent people of Sri Lanka has taken an enormous toll, as poignantly reported in Time magazine: “Sri Lanka has been in ceaseless turmoil for more than three decades... Fighting has gone on for so long now that it has brutalized an entire society, creating a culture of violence that haunts the country whether there is fighting or not” (April 5, 2007).

We urge the great citizens of this country and the U.S government to take the following actions to help restore peace, justice, and democracy in Sri Lanka, and protect the victimized Tamil population:

- Support the current Senate language in HR 2764 that would restrict military aid to Sri Lanka;
- Join the Price-Holt initiative in the US House of Representatives in asking President Bush to “increase U.S. diplomatic engagement and high-level political contact in Sri Lanka to work toward achieving a lasting peace... increase U.S. efforts to promote strong human rights protections for civilians”;
- Encourage the involvement of the United Nations to monitor human rights on the ground;
- Put pressure on the Sri Lankan government to rescind the declaration of Tamil land in Trincomalee area as high security zone thereby preventing the resettlement of the Tamils and Muslims;
- Demand the Sri Lankan government immediately allow humanitarian organizations unrestricted access to conflict areas and open the A-9 highway to Jaffna;
- Promote lasting peace through a permanent resolution, not excluding a two-state solution
- Recognize and support the Tamil people’s right to self-determination.

Thank You.

Sincerely,

(see signatures on the attached pages)