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Sri Lanka Withdraws from Cease Fire Agreement

iTRO is shocked and concerned that the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) has unilaterally abrogated the Cease Fire Agreement (CFA) it entered into with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in February 2002. The abrogation of the CFA by the GoSL will plunge the country back into all out war and the effects on the civilian population will be devastating.

This callous act has extinguished any hope that the international community and the Tamil people had in achieving a peaceful resolution to the Sri Lankan conflict and is the culmination of the GoSL's rejection of the legitimate expression of the Tamils' fundamental rights.

Restricting Humanitarian Relief and Removing International Witnesses

The current environment in areas controlled by the GoSL is well documented and the international community is aware of the atrocious human rights record of the GoSL: the rising human rights violations, the climate of impunity, the extra-judicial executions, disappearances, torture, a silencing of press freedom, an elimination of dissenting views by intimidation and death, a silencing of Tamil voices within and outside Sri Lanka, the assassination of Tamil Members of Parliament, and a political climate that stakes its survival on the expression of military might and an authoritative and hawkish administration. The abrogation of the CFA and the departure of the independent Nordic Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) will further exacerbate the situation by removing the one impartial third party witness that was able access the conflict areas of the NorthEast and make regular public reports.

Over the past two years the GoSL has sought to remove international organizations from the NorthEast so as to reduce the witnesses to the violations of International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law and to restrict the amount of humanitarian aid reaching the Tamil people. Many international NGOs have been forced to leave the country due to the pressures exerted on them by the GoSL and in some cases have been expressly ordered to leave by the government. Others have not had their international staff's work visas or work permits renewed and thus have had to leave the country or have been unable to access the NorthEast.

Over 50 humanitarian workers have been killed over the past two years, the Action Contra La Faim 17 and the TRO 7 were the two major incidences, and there have been numerous attacks on NGO offices and personnel. The GoSL has also sought to hinder the work of the Tamils Rehabilitation Organization (TRO) by first freezing its bank accounts and then by "banning" it.

These actions have been aimed at reducing the amount of humanitarian aid reaching the NorthEast and preventing the international NGOs and UN Agencies from speaking out for fear that they will be forced to leave the country. The intention of the GoSL is now unequivocal and signals the imminent humanitarian devastation of the Tamils of the NorthEast.

Development, Relief and the Diaspora during the CFA

Over the last 6 years international and local organisations have worked tirelessly to keep the hopes of peace alive despite the numerous threats to their personal safety. Humanitarian workers, media personnel, members of civil society and parliamentarians have been assassinated, executed, abducted and otherwise harassed by the GoSL, its affiliated paramilitaries and the state sponsored media.

During this period international and local NGOs, parliamentarians, peace builders, and UN executives have been accused of being "terrorists", "terrorist sympathisers" and of "funding terrorism" by the GoSL. Civil Society has been pressured through intimidation and executions to prevent any effective humanitarian interventions. All avenues for the protection of Tamils and their right to life with dignity have been systematically eliminated. Now, even the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), a strong witness to atrocities against Tamils, has been forced to leave.

The unilateral withdrawal by the GoSL from CFA has effectively closed the door to development for the people of NorthEast. The GoSL has also seriously hampered the delivery of relief and rehabilitation to the war and tsunami

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affected populations over the past 2 years and the Tamils areas lag far behind in tsunami recovery with Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL) reporting that its investigations reveal that over US\$535 million have gone missing in Sri Lanka.

After the signing of the CFA the International Community encouraged the Tamil Diaspora to become more directly involved in the peace process and development. The Tamil Diaspora contributed time, expertise and funds to help alleviate the suffering of the civilian population and deliver the expected “peace dividend”.

Unfortunately, this is no longer the case and some countries over the past two years have actively sought to restrict the ability of the Tamil Diaspora to provide humanitarian assistance to those in the NorthEast. This is due to the negative campaigns and propaganda of the GoSL that attempt to characterize all Tamil voices critical of the GoSL as being “terrorists” or “terrorist supporters”.

APPEAL

iTRO appeals to these countries to allow space for the Tamil Diaspora to provide much needed humanitarian assistance to their people. International organizations have been restricted in their ability to access the affected areas and deliver the necessary relief and the GoSL has restricted food, medicine, fuel and construction materials to the Vanni. As a result in many areas TRO is the only organization with access to the war and tsunami affected populations.

iTRO wishes to clearly state that the IC, through its policies and the exertion of power and influence, has had a significant degree of influence in engineering and steering the course of this conflict and the failed “peace process” to its current state of affairs and thus is culpable and must accept some responsibility for the impending calamity that is facing the Tamils.

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