

# TAMIL GUARDIAN

## **Tamils' cause finds support amongst candidates from all three British parties**

3 May 2010

Dozens of parliamentary candidates from all three major British parties responded this weekend to inquiries by the Tamil Guardian regarding their stance on the Tamil question in Sri Lanka. The responses from, or on behalf of, eighteen Labour, fifteen Liberal Democrat and twenty four Conservative candidates reflects increasing awareness of, and engagement with, Sri Lanka's protracted and entrenched ethnic crisis in Britain's political spaces, the paper's researchers said.

As Britain goes to the polls on Thursday, a key issue for many British Tamil voters is UK policy on Sri Lanka and the Tamil question there. In this regard, the Tamil Guardian contacted the offices of several candidates last week seeking their views.

Several candidates from all three parties responded promptly with individual comments, which are reproduced below (some were edited for brevity). The British Tamil Conservatives (BTC) group issued a statement on behalf of the campaigns of several Conservative MPs and candidates they have been working with. Tamil members of the Liberal Democrats responded on behalf of some of their candidates. Meanwhile, coinciding with Tamil Guardian's inquiry, eight Labour MPs issued a joint statement to Tamil media. Both texts are also reproduced below.

Several candidates were readily more forthright in their views than their respective party's official stances, the Tamil Guardian's research summary said. Many more were clearly engaged closely with the details of the Tamils' hardships in Sri Lanka and with the foundations of the Tamil demand for self-determination.

| <b>Constituency</b>        | <b>Party</b>      | <b>Candidate Name</b> | <b>Response</b>   |
|----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Bermondsey & Old Southwark | Liberal Democrats | Simon Hughes          | Simon Hughes is long time supporter of the Tamil struggle for self determination. He stood by the Tamils during the parliament square protests and was instrumental in organising meetings between the Tamil Diaspora representatives and international organisations at the height of war. Simon is also a member of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Tamils.   |
| Bermondsey & Old Southwark | Labour            | Valerie Shawcross     | I am standing on Labour's record and manifesto. The Labour party strongly supports reconstruction and reconciliation in Sri Lanka. We believe that both the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka must be held to account for the loss of civilian life, and we will continue to urge the Sri Lankan Government to fulfil its commitment to a full and fair investigation into war crimes committed in the final months of civil war. Human rights and democracy are a central feature of our foreign policy for a simple reason - we believe that human rights are universal.   |
| Bexleyheath & Crayford     | Labour            | Howard Dawber         | I wholeheartedly endorse the statement that the Tamil people have a right to self-determination. I am very concerned about the human rights for Tamil people in Sri Lanka and want to see the international community much more active in finding a solution. More widely I am concerned about the democratic situation in Sri Lanka. The UK has been a true friend to the Sri Lankan people - both Sinhalese and Tamil - and as a true friend should be very clear with the Sri Lankan Government that their position is not acceptable. I hope that it is possible for both these communities to co-exist peacefully on the island of Sri Lanka and that a permanent solution can be found which meets the aspirations and needs of the Tamil people. |
| Brent Central              | Labour            | Dawn Butler           | Joint Statement (see below)   |

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| Brent Central              | Liberal Democrats | Sarah Teather              | Sarah is a long standing supporter of the Tamils struggle and has voiced her support for Tamils rights on numerous occasions.   |
| Brent North                | Labour            | Barry Gardiner             | Joint Statement (see below)   |
| Brent North                | Liberal Democrats | James Allie                | James has supported Tamils in the past and addressed the mass rally in October 2009.  |
| Bromley & Chislehurst      | Conservatives     | Bob Neill                  | See BTC statement below   |
| Carshalton & Wallington    | Conservatives     | Ken Andrew                 | See BTC statement below   |
| Carshalton & Wallington    | Liberal Democrats | Tom Brake                  | Tom is a strong supporter of the Tamils struggle and has worked closely with the British Tamil community in the past. He said: 'I have been working closely with my Tamil community for a number of months... the human rights of the Tamil community are being grossly infringed and are under a sustained onslaught in Sri Lanka.'  |
| Chelsea & Fulham           | Labour            | Alexander Hilton           | Firstly we have to consider the outrageous behaviour of SL GOV in recent years. There was of course more hope at the time of the Norwegian peace deal. However there are also militant people on the Tamil side, who have acted as barriers to peace. Now that the militant Tamil warlords are either dead or captured, I think we have to look to Tamils as oppressed people, and protect them as we would protect other oppressed people in other parts of the world. |
| Chingford & Woodford Green | Labour            | Catherine Isabel Arakalian | I wish to support Tamil people in seeking justice. The restoration of civil and political freedoms to minority groups and the upholding of human rights are Labour values. The principle of self-determination is an important one to defend, particularly in the face of overwhelming military might. I support non-violent peaceful resistance and, if elected, would support any initiatives by the British Tamil community which seek solution through negotiation. |
| Chingford & Woodford Green | Conservatives     | Iain Duncan Smith          | See BTC statement below   |
| Chipping Barnet            | Conservatives     | Theresa Villiers           | See BTC statement below   |
| Croydon Central            | Conservatives     | Gavin Barwell              | See BTC statement below   |
| Croydon North              | Conservatives     | Jason Hadden               | I have been very much involved in this issue – we now have 2 Tamil candidates standing in North Croydon in the council elections and I have brought thus far 12 senior Conservative Party leaders to meet with the local Tamil community  |

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| Croydon South     | Conservatives     | Richard Ottaway   | See BTC statement below  |
| Ealing North      | Liberal Democrats | Chris Lucas       | Endorsed Lib Dem party statement on Sri Lanka  |
| Ealing North      | Labour            | Stephen Pound     | My support for and commitment to th Tamil people has been unswerving throughout my years as an MP and I am delighted to confirm that the Labour Party now has a manifesto commitment to an international tribunal on the war crimes committed in the north and east of Sri Lanka - this contrasts with the frequent visits made by the Conservative shadow Defence Minister to the current President of the GOSL. I believe passionately that as the UK is part of the problem in Sri Lanka it has to be a part of the solution and I will continue to work with the community and with individuals to obtain peace and security in this country and an independent state in the homeland.   |
| Ealing Southall   | Labour            | Virendra Sharma   | Joint Statement (see below)  |
| East Ham          | Conservatives     | Paul Shea         | See BTC statement below. Paul was one of the speakers at the launch event of Global Tamils Forum in February   |
| East Ham          | Labour            | Stephen Timms     | Joint Statement (see below)  |
| Eltham            | Conservatives     | David Gold        | I have been following events in Sri Lanka very closely and am deeply concerned by the tragic humanitarian situation in the northern part of the country. Tragically, civilians have been caught up in a situation of absolute terror resulting in suffering on a massive scale. I had the enormous privilege of addressing an event at Excel Centre to mark the Tamil Day of Remembrance and met many British Tamils who have lost loved ones or are separated from them because of the atrocities being inflicted in Sri Lanka. I reported on my conversations to William Hague, the Shadow Foreign Secretary for whom I used to work, and I know that he maintains a close eye on the events in Sri Lanka. It is clear there is a long way to go before a peaceful resolution can be found. Please be assured that I will continue to monitor the situation closely and do whatever I can to keep this issue alive here in the UK among key decision makers. |
| Eltham            | Liberal Democrats | Steven Toole      | Endorsed Lib Dem party statement on Sri Lanka  |
| Enfield North     | Labour            | Joan Ryan         | Joint Statement (see below)  |
| Enfield Southgate | Conservatives     | David Burrowes    | See BTC statement below  |
| Harrow West       | Liberal Democrats | Christopher Noyce | I am in favour of establishing the state of Tamil Eelam as envisaged by the Vaddukoddai Resolution.  |

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| Harrow West            | Labour            | Gareth Thomas    | I have a track record of supporting the Tamils' legitimate political aspirations and will work with our international partners and Disapora organisations to achieve peace and stability for the Tamil people. Also Joint Statement (see below)   |
| Harrow West            | Conservatives     | Rachel Joyce     | I believe that since independence the acts perpetrated by the Government of Sri Lanka on the Tamils including the burning down of the Jaffna Library, the refusal to act on the Vaddukoddai resolution, disappearances of Tamil individuals, refusal to allow Tamil to be an official language of Sri Lanka, firing on the so-called "safe zone", the relocation of Tamils and moving in of Sinhalese into traditional Tamil areas, and the use of concentration-style camps for internally displaced Tamils should be classed as Genocide. I will work with the Tamils to get the acts perpetrated on the Tamils classed legally as a genocide so that the UN Convention can be used to address the problems. It has been my long-standing view that the only true path to peace in Sri Lanka is with a political settlement with the creation of Eelam being the only solution that has a strong chance of long-term success. |
| Hayes and Harlington   | Labour            | John McDonnell   | I support the Tamil people in their search for justice and freedom. That is why I condemned the barbaric attacks on the Tamil people by the Sri Lankan army and why I called for an immediate ceasefire and the release of Tamils from the camps. I have also condemned the colonisation policies of the Sri Lankan government that are ousting Tamil families from their homes. I opposed the ban on the LTTE and now support the election of the trans national government. I firmly believe that the Tamil people should have the democratic right to determine their own future.  |
| Leicester East         | Labour            | Keith Vaz        | Joint Statement (see below)   |
| Hendon                 | Labour            | Andrew Dismore   | Joint Statement (see below)   |
| Hendon                 | Liberal Democrats | Matthew Harris   | In Sri Lanka, there must be an investigation into allegations of human rights violations and war crimes. The government in Colombo will be judged by the international community on its political and judicial reforms and by the way it treats the media. The Sri Lankan government must reach out and recognise its past mistakes.  |
| Hornchurch & Upminster | Conservatives     | Angela Watkinson | See BTC statement below   |

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| Iford North                | Liberal Democrats | Alex Berhau       | There has been a long history of support for self-determination by Liberals in this country. This is not being ignored in the Liberal Democrats. However, each oppressed people have a different story and the statistics that I have read show that the Tamil case is not one to be ignored either. Alex Berhanu hails from northern Ethiopia where he grew up. He experienced suffering there due to ethnic conflict and does not wish to see any other such cases. As a result he is very much a supporter of a peaceful end to the suffering and oppression of the Tamil people. |
| Iford North                | Conservatives     | Lee Scott         | As a officer of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Tamils I have defended Tamil rights for 5 years I will continue to do so,. I think Tamil community need control of the own destiny and for the Sri Lankan government to allow the rights of all Tamil community to be protected I will fight to achieve this. I thank the community for all the support they have given me.  |
| Iford South                | Conservatives     | Toby Boutle       | See BTC statement below  |
| Islington South & Finsbury | Conservatives     | Antonia Cox       | I am already aware that Tamil self governance is an extremely important issue and have made a note to investigate further when I have time after the election campaign.  |
| Kingston & Surbiton        | Liberal Democrats | Edward Davey      | Edward is a strong supporter of the Tamils struggle and has worked closely with the British Tamil community in the past. He stood by the Tamils during the parliamentary protests and facilitated meetings with the UN and the Diaspora Tamil representatives last year.   |
| Lewisham East              | Liberal Democrats | Peter Pattison    | As the Liberal Democrat prospective MP in Lewisham East, I have fought long and hard to support the local Tamil community, and I will continue to do so. I helped monitor the recent referendum and I do support the Tamils right to self-determination.   |
| Mitcham & Morden           | Labour            | Siobhain McDonagh | Joint Statement (see below)  |
| Old Bexley & Sidcup        | Conservatives     | James Brokenshire | See BTC statement below  |
| Orpington                  | Conservatives     | Jo Johnson        | I spent much time in Sri Lanka as a foreign correspondent and have seen at close hand the issues facing the Tamil community in their struggle for greater political autonomy.. I deplore the violent suppression of this movement and support a mediated settlement.   |

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| Putney        | Labour            | Stuart King   | Ever since my time as a Labour councillor in Tooting, which is home to much of the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora in London, I have understood and sympathised with the Tamil desire for an independent homeland. I consider myself a friend of the Tamil people.  |
| Richmond Park | Liberal Democrats | Susan Kramer  | Susan is a strong supporter of the Tamils struggle and has worked closely with the British Tamil community in the past. She took a Tamil delegation to meet the EU External affairs high commissioner during the height of war.   |
| Richmond Park | Conservatives     | Zac Goldsmith | <p>I have been following events in Sri Lanka and like you, I am deeply concerned by the humanitarian situation in the northern part of the country. During the fighting, the Conservatives called for a ceasefire on both sides to allow the civilians to leave the conflict area, to be monitored by international observers including the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross. We are extremely concerned about conditions in the camps established by the Sri Lankan government for internally displaced people. We have repeatedly urged the Sri Lankan government to take all possible measures to prevent further suffering by allowing UN and relief organisations full and unrestricted access to provide shelter, food, water, and medicine, and to oversee the screening process.</p> <p>The Shadow Foreign Secretary, William Hague, raised these concerns with the Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka, Hon Rohitha Bogollagama, when he met with him earlier this month. William Hague has also asked for the UK government to consider the Conservatives' proposal for an internationally managed development fund to channel relief aid to the north of the country. This is a mechanism which we hope the Tamil Diaspora from around the world could constructively support and which we believe would be seen as independent and impartial. Now that the worst of the conflict is over, it is vital that the Sri Lankan government takes immediate steps to promote national reconciliation so that renewed violence does not occur. The only way forward for long-term stability in Sri Lanka is a negotiated settlement that satisfies the concerns and legitimate aspirations of all Sri Lankans and preserves democracy. Although we cannot lay down the details from outside, Conservatives believe that strong international support is essential for a peace settlement in the country.</p> |

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|                             |                   |                  | We have called on the Sri Lankan government to engage all ethnic groups in a genuine political process. The general deterioration of the human rights situation in the country along with restrictions of the media must also be urgently addressed and William Hague has called for an UN Observer Mission to visit Sri Lanka as soon as possible.  |
| Romford                     | Conservatives     | Andrew Rosindell | See BTC statement below  |
| Ruislip, Northwood & Pinner | Labour            | Anita McDonald   | I am very much in favour of Tamil self-governance, and have campaigned alongside Tamil representatives in my area and the surrounding Harrow area. If elected, I would represent them in this issue.   |
| Ruislip, Northwood & Pinner | Conservatives     | Nick Hurd        | See BTC statement below  |
| Streatham                   | Liberal Democrats | Chris Nicholson  | Endorsed Lib Dem party statement on Sri Lanka  |
| Sutton & Cheam              | Liberal Democrats | Paul Burstow     | Paul is a strong supporter of the Tamils struggle and has worked closely with the British Tamil community in the past. Early last year, Paul presented a petition to Parliament on behalf of the Tamil community in his constituency calling on the Government to do everything in its power to secure a ceasefire.  |
| Tooting                     | Conservatives     | Mark Clarke      | See BTC statement below  |
| Tooting                     | Labour            | Sadiq Khan       | Joint Statement (see below)  |
| Walthamstow                 | Labour            | Stella Creasy    | <p>Having worked closely with the Tamil community in Walthamstow for many years including helping oversee the Tamil community referendum on self determination I am proud our Labour Government has led international criticism of Sri Lanka. In particular the work of our ministers to help secure the EU's agreement to end the system of GSP+ status represents a significant breakthrough in securing international agreement that the human rights of Tamils must be protected. I am also proud of the aid we have given to help those displaced from their homes in Sri Lanka. I pledge to continue to do what I can to support human rights and the provision of development aid for the Tamil community in Sri Lanka if I am elected as Walthamstow's next Labour MP.</p> <p>I also want to pay tribute to the work of many organisations including the Tamil Housing Association here and the excellent work they do supporting our local Tamil Community.</p> |



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| Wimbledon | Liberal Democrats | Shas Sheehan        | Proper talks are necessary to uphold the rights of the Tamil and Muslim populations in Sri Lanka. The United Kingdom must push for the rights of minority groups and an end to all ethnic violence. After a 26 year war, charges of war crimes on both sides must be investigated, but it is critical that the UN, an independent international body, organise such an investigation, rather than the Sri Lankan government. Rest assured that my colleagues and I will continue to fight with you for justice and peace in Sri Lanka in this new post-war environment  |
| Wimbledon | Conservatives     | Stephen Hammond     | See BTC statement below   |
| Harlow    | Conservatives     | Robert Halfon       | The Tamils have suffered a most terrible genocide. They have endured Internment camps and have had their basic human rights taken away. Like any other nation, they should be given the freedom and democracy they deserve. This includes measures of self determination and the rights to their own democratic government under the rule of law. Never again should law abiding and peaceful Tamils have their rights taken away.  |
| Edmonton  | Conservatives     | Andrew Charalambous | <p>It is my view that the last 60 years of post-independence history of the Island of Ceylon has proven that the legitimate political rights and the basic human rights of Tamils can only be asserted if they are granted the right to self determination. The ancient Tamil Nation possesses a treasure of cultural and spiritual traditions that deserve to be protected in the interest of the great heritage of the entire Humankind. Unfortunately, neither has this happened thus far under successive Sri Lankan regimes, neither do the Tamil People themselves expect a brighter future under the current political conditions. I strongly believe that, based on the human right to self determination, the Tamil people on the island should be rightfully given a chance to express their political aspiration democratically through a referendum. If they so desire, based on the international laws and conventions, the international community should listen to the will of the Tamil people- and their aspiration to re-establish their natural and historical homeland of Tamil Eelam.</p> <p>It is my pledge to the Tamil people in the UK, that if I am elected as an MP for Edmonton, I will initiate a private members' bill in the British Parliament, to further the Tamil peoples' rights to self determination in their traditional homeland, Tamil Eelam. I will demand the recognition of all the human rights of The Tamil People including the right to Self Determination.</p> |

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|  |  |  | Moreover I will be calling for the immediate expulsion of the Sri Lankan state from the British Commonwealth, until such time as the United Nations demonstrate and the international community satisfied that the ongoing human rights violations have all but ceased. |
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**British Tamil Conservatives statement:**

“In the past two years several Conservative Party parliamentarians and candidates have been working closely with British Tamils in their constituencies in focusing their party leadership’s close attention to the persecution being endured by the Tamil people of Sri Lanka, as well as the Tamil people’s legitimate political aspirations for self-determination. The BTC has been asked to respond to the Tamil Guardian’s inquiry on their behalf, and would also like to take the opportunity to thank them for their strong support for our community.

**Joint statement by eight Labour MPs:**

The Cause:

The Tamil people have been mistreated by the Sri Lankan Government. Thousands of civilians have been killed and thousands more displaced. The battles may be over but the fight for peace is still going on.

The Sri Lankan Government will need to change its policy towards the Tamil people and recognise their legitimate political, economic and civil rights. This will require sustained international scrutiny to bring about the change the Tamil people deserve.

### Why Labour?

Labour's true values in internationalism, social justice and liberty are in common with the values of the Tamil people. This will be fundamental to helping the Tamil people achieve peace in Sri Lanka.

We also achieved some results over time;

- GSP+ suspension and Abstaining IMF Loan Vote
- Rejection of Commonwealth Conference in Sri Lanka for 2011
- The Labour Party Manifesto commitment for a war crimes investigation

### Our Pledge:

The road to Tamil freedom and justice is long but we pledge to work with you towards:

- An independent War Crimes investigation
- Working with All Tamil Organisations including BTF, GTF and TGTE to work towards
- Resettlement and rehabilitation of IDP's
- Reconstruction of Tamil Home Land
- Supporting and facilitating their democratic endeavors for a political solution