

S.Kajendren
(former Member of Parliament)
General Secretary
Tamil National Peoples Front
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At the very outset, I would like to thank Mr. Paul Murphy and the GUE/NGL group of MEPs for not only having organised this very timely hearing on the conflict in the island of Sri Lanka, but also for inviting our party to make submissions at this hearing. At a time when the destiny and the very existence of the Tamil people is very much in the balance, it is our sincere hope and wish that this hearing forms a stepping stone to some concrete action being taken within the European Parliament regarding the legitimate struggle of the Tamil people for justice and peace.

ORIGINS OF THE CONFLICT

The conflict in the island of Sri Lanka stems from certain demographic realities prevalent in the island, as well as the region. The island of Sri Lanka comprises of two nations. The Sinhala speaking Sinhala nation, and the Tamil speaking Tamil nation. The Sinhala nation comprises the larger population of the island and is geographically situated in the south, west and centre of the island. The Tamil nation comprises the smaller population of the island and is geographically situated in the north and east of the island. Prior to the advent of European colonial rule, each nation had their own kingdoms. It was only the British colonial power that amalgamated the Tamil nation with that of the Sinhalese for administrative convenience.

Whilst this may be the demographic reality in the island of Sri Lanka, the greater region offers an opposite reality, with 62 million Tamils living in Tamil Nadu, in the southern tip of India (separated by just 22 miles of ocean). In other words, the Sinhala people are a minority in the region. This is a demographic fact. This demographic fact is compounded by the memory of rule of the Sinhala people by Tamil kings. As can be seen by the fact that the last King of Kandy signed his surrender to the British in the Tamil language (and not in the Sinhala language).

Hence the real concern that the Sinhala people have is that the existence of the Tamil nation in the island of Sri Lanka may become a focus for a pan Tamil nationalism, and that this will threaten the very existence of the Sinhala nation in the island.

In turn, the Tamil struggle is not about discrimination but about freedom from alien rule by a permanent Sinhala majority. It is this permanent Sinhala rule, which is evidenced, for instance, by the fact that in Sri Lanka, for six long decades since the departure of the last European colonial power, we have always had a Sinhala Buddhist as the executive head of government.

Many people think that the Tamil people's struggle is against Sinhala oppression. In fact, the question is not whether Sinhala rule is oppressive (though, in fact it is). If the question was 'oppressive Sinhala rule', the solution to the conflict would be benevolent Sinhala rule. The bottom line is that the struggle of the Tamil people is about their democratic right to rule themselves - and it is this right that they seek to protect. The fact is that it is as a free people, that the togetherness of the Tamil people rooted in an ancient heritage and a rich language will find vibrant expression. It is as a free people that they will be able to nurture the growth of their children and their children's children to the fullness of their potential. If democracy means the rule of the people, by the people and for people, then equally, no one person may rule another.

Accordingly it is quite clear that, the interest that each party to the conflict in the island seeks to protect is the mirror image of the interest of the other party. The Sinhala people seek to secure their national identity against a Tamil majority in the region. The people of Tamil Eelam seek to secure their own separate national identity within the island of Sri Lanka. The Sinhala people fear rule by the Tamil majority in the region. The people of Tamil Eelam fear rule by the Sinhala majority within the island of Sri Lanka.

WAR AND THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH

As a result, the Sinhalese people see the very existence of the Tamils as a nation of people, as an existential threat to themselves. It is for these reasons that from the time the European colonial powers departed, all Sinhala dominated governments in Sri Lanka have meticulously gone about the task of dismantling the existence of the Tamils as a nation of people. Such actions include colonisation of the Tamil areas with state sponsored Sinhala settlements, with the intent to change the demography of the region with the intent of making the Tamils a minority in their own homeland. Tamil heritage sites have been systematically destroyed. The Self sustaining economy of the Tamil people has been systematically targeted. The education system has been deliberately fashioned to the detriment of the Tamil people. The Tamil people even were made to lose their language rights, effectively disenfranchising them. These were all in addition to the regular state sponsored racial pogroms that targeted the Tamil people resulting deaths in their thousands.

There can be little doubt that all Sinhala dominated governments acted in a concerted way, so as to deliberately and systematically destroy, the existence of the Tamils in whole or in part, as an [ethnic](#), [racial](#), [religious](#), or [national](#) group. In other words, what the Tamil people were facing was a slow and calculated genocide.

Despite many efforts by Tamil political leaders to politically and non violently find solutions to the conflict, none were acceptable to the Sinhala people. It was the refusal of the Sinhala nation to politically recognise the existence of the Tamils as a nation of people, coupled with in fact, the relentless drive to dismantle the very existence of the Tamils as a distinct nation that led to the Tamils resorting to armed struggle in desperation to safe guard their very existence. It was the LTTE that came to lead the armed struggle till the 18th of May 2009.

Whilst this was the reality for the Tamils taking up arms against the Sri Lankan state, many in the international community simply saw the armed struggle as one of terrorism. The LTTE was proscribed and the Sri Lankan state backed in its efforts to militarily defeat the LTTE. Whilst the Tamil people knew otherwise, the international community believed that once the LTTE and the armed struggle was removed from the picture, the Sinhala people would feel secure enough to come up with a political solution in the form of bringing about constitutional changes so that the Sinhala and Tamil nations could share power.

Unfortunately the reality is otherwise! The Tamil people continue to be deliberately targeted. Two years since the LTTE was militarily defeated, the Tamil homeland has been militarised more than even during the war. Private land of the Tamil people have been confiscated amounting to thousands of acres in the guise of High Security Zones. This is in addition to the informal methods used by the government to chase the Tamil people from their traditional areas of habitation. The continued persecution of the Tamil people even after the end of the armed conflict is well documented by many international human rights organisations like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and The International Crisis Group. Make no mistake! The systematic genocide of the Tamil people continues today, unabated!

PROSPECTS FOR LASTING PEACE

So what then are the prospects of reaching a sustainable lasting political solution to the conflict, which is the only way a lasting and sustainable peace between the conflicting Tamil and Sinhala nations can be found? In addition to the obvious need to have a comprehensive independent international inquiry into genocide that is faced by the Tamil people in the island of Sri Lanka, which our party holds imperative. We are clear that such an investigation must focus on the last 60 years and not merely the war crimes committed during the last stages of the war.

It is also our contention that whilst accountability for the atrocities committed against the Tamil people is imperative for any forward movement, fundamentally, the conflict in the island of Sri Lanka is a political one that needs a political solution. Thus far, the suggested conflict resolution process has been one of expecting the Sri Lankan state to transform itself through devolutionary process that would result in a power sharing arrangement between that Sinhalese and the Tamil peoples. In other words, whilst the State as an entity is sacrosanct, a federal arrangement must be arrived at through a process of internal restructuring. In practical terms what this stipulates is a top-down process, or devolution, that eventually results in an 'acceptable' federal arrangement.

The question is, what is to happen if the Sri Lankan State not only rejects such transformation, but also is in fact in the process of transforming itself in a different direction, namely entrenching further Sinhala Buddhist hegemony over the State, as is the reality?

Under these circumstances it is our contention that one must revisit democratic values in its fullest sense, if one is to envision a realistic conflict resolution process in the island of Sri Lanka. The reality is that the island of Sri Lanka is inhabited by a Sinhalese nation of people that comprises a permanent and overwhelming majority of the population of the island, and a numerically smaller Tamil nation. This being the case, for as long as conflict resolution is viewed through a simplistic statist paradigm there can be no prospects for success. A 75% population that over the last 60 years has sought to, and continues to, entrench its hegemony of the State is not going to suddenly change course. A Sinhala nation that was unflinchingly willing to commit war crimes and crimes against humanity amounting to genocide, in order to re establish complete Sinhala hegemony over the entire island is suddenly not going to change course. **On the contrary, recognising the Sri Lankan State as the only power centre on the island, where the Sinhala Buddhist nation is the sole custodian of the State, will only go to reinforce conflict, and most certainly will be a shot in the arm for the ongoing genocidal practices of the state.**

Instead we wish to advocate an incremental bottom-up approach to conflict resolution. In other words, the constituent nations of the island, the Sinhala Nation and the Tamil Nation, have to be recognised as an essential first step along with each of their rights to self-determination. This will result in the political recognition of two power centres on the island. **The conflict resolution process that is envisaged is one where these two power centres are, once recognised, asked to agree on arrangements that make each associate with one another for the mutual benefit of both. So the conflict resolution process that is advocated is not one of State transformation, but one of State formation, if you like, where the Tamil nation and Sinhala nation work out structures, within which each nation may remain free secure and prosper, but at the same time pool sovereignty in certain agreed areas. In other words, the coming together of two distinct and sovereign nations, by a process of pooling of agreed aspects of each of their sovereignties to form a State. This is what we mean by our party's slogan - "TWO NATIONS; ONE COUNTRY".**

Such a process will without doubt address many of the current shortcomings hitherto experienced, namely,

- The Tamil and Sinhala Nations will have equal status – the absence of which has been at the crux of the conflict.
- Will result in an end to majoritarianism.
- Will inherently recognise the plural nature of the island.
- Will be in keeping with the right to self-determination of peoples.

Thanking You

S.Kajendren
General Secretary
Tamil National Peoples Front