

# TAMIL CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

## POLICY DOCUMENT

**(Adopted on 15.11.2014 at the Forum's Annual General Meeting)**

**Description:** TCSF is a network of Tamil Civil Society Activists living and/or working primarily in the North - Eastern<sup>1</sup> parts of Sri Lanka

**Aim:** The aim of the forum is to protect and promote the existential rights of the Tamil people and the exercise of their right to self determine their social, political, linguistic, cultural and economic future.

**Objective(s):** The primary objective of the forum is to create, provide space and act as a medium for the articulation and expression of the views of its membership on contemporary issues of social, political, economic and cultural interests to the Tamil people living in the island of Sri Lanka. Towards this end the Forum will strive to

- a) organize public events in the form of workshops, seminars, conferences, public consultations art, drama and theatre.
- b) mobilise grass roots activists through empowerment programmes and the active creation of spaces.
- c) engage in research activism relating to the social, political and economic well-being of the Tamil people and related issues.
- d) engage through advocacy and lobbying with relevant stakeholders in relation to the well being of the Tamil people.

### **Core beliefs of TCSF:**

1. TCSF endorses the Thimphu principles of 1985. The following two are core principles in this regard: a) The right to self determination of the Tamil people based on a collective self-conscious on the part of the Tamil people as them being a Nation. Owing to their right to self-determination, the Tamil people are a sovereign nation and *vice versa*. b) The North and East parts of the island of Sri Lanka is the traditional homeland of the Tamil people and thus constitutes the self determining unit of the Tamil Nation.

TCSF however does not claim exclusivity in its identification of the Tamil homeland. It recognises that Muslims and Sinhalese live and have lived in the North-East and recognises their claim to land in the North East to the extent that such claim is unadulterated by colonisation that aims at ethnic re-engineering of the North-East, including most significantly state-aided colonization.

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<sup>1</sup> The hyphenated term 'North-East' is preferred over the term usage of 'North and East' to emphasise the territorial contiguity of the Tamil homeland

2. TCSF stands for a negotiated political solution of the Tamil political question underwritten by international participation and international law. Any solution has to provide for the effective exercise of the right to self-determination of the Tamil people within its self-determining unit. The form and content of the political institutions that form part of the political solution have to acknowledge the continuing nature of this right. Any political solution and the resulting state structure devoid of prior recognition of the right to self-determination will not guarantee an effective form of self-government for the Tamil people. TCSF believes that any solution within a unitary state would not be acceptable. Any existing structures within the unitary state (the provincial council system) would not even be a starting point to a political solution.

The forum believes in developing a political package that responds to the Tamil National Question through a broader process of bottom-up consultation of the Tamil people. Such a political package should address the political, social and economic goals and vision of the Tamil Nation.

3. We recognise the right of the Sinhala, Muslim and Up Country Tamil people to choose their own political identity and also believe that the Muslims and Up Country Tamils should be treated as equal but independent partners in a process that addresses their political rights. Muslims, Up Country Tamils and Tamils should act in solidarity and should avoid allowing their politics to be used by majoritarian politics to undercut and undermine the aspirations of each other. TCSF believes that the Sinhalese as the numerically larger nation, should recognize the right to self-determination of the Tamil people and the chosen political identity of the other communities. Such recognition may lead to a new social contract between the different constituent nations and peoples of Sri Lanka and to a vibrant and genuine democracy for all.
4. TCSF believes in democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Our understanding of democracy goes beyond representative democracy. TCSF believes in the active creation of spaces for post-representative democracy such as citizens committees and citizens action in the public sphere.
5. TCSF stands for social justice and equality in the economic realm and for individual and collective economic autonomy in the pursuit of this goal. TCSF stands for state investment and intervention for the delivery of public goods and to ensure fair and equitable opportunity for every one. State design and the war have placed the Tamils in an inherently disadvantageous position vis-à-vis the other constituent communities of Sri Lanka. TCSF believes that Tamils should be given the space to conceive and build their own economic model that guarantees their collective economic well-being.
6. A vibrant space for cultural expression is essential for a democracy and for

the self-expression of a nation. TCSF recognises that culture is an evolving practice. It however believes that the Tamils have had an internally pluralistic but distinct cultural practice which needs to be given recognition. TCSF is opposed to the forceful distortion of the historical, archaeological and cultural heritage of the Tamils aimed at Sinhala Buddhisisation of the Tamil homeland.

7. TCSF stands for the promotion and protection of the Tamil language.
8. TCSF believes in social justice and will express solidarity and work with all marginalized sections of society. TCSF firmly believes in a caste-less Tamil society and believes in affirmative action as a means of achieving this goal.
9. TCSF has no religious affiliation. Tamil Nationalism never has and should not have a religious affiliation. A future Tamil self-government should treat all religions with respect and provide the space for all religions to co-exist and flourish. A future constitutional settlement should not give any particular religion a 'foremost place' status.
10. TCSF is committed to genuine gender parity and will strive towards the eradication of all forms of discrimination against women.
11. TCSF stands for accountability for past injustices and maintains the position that accountability cannot be bartered away for the attainment of a political solution. We also firmly believe that domestic mechanisms lack sufficient will to deliver on accountability.
12. TCSF believes that the Tamil people's engagement with international actors in the search for accountability and political solution should be mounted from an independent, non-partisan platform. Such engagement should be motivated only by the best interests of the Tamil people.
13. TCSF believes that the diaspora is a key component of the Tamil nation. Given that its an integral part of the Tamil Nation it is a legitimate actor in the Tamils' search for accountability and for a political solution.
14. TCSF also believes that the Global Tamil Community, in particular the people of Tamil Nadu with whom we enjoy a special relationship, are an important stakeholder in our search for accountability and for a political solution.