

PRESS STATEMENT – All Party Parliamentary Group for Tamils (APPG for Tamils)

Assassination of Human Rights Activists has become the norm in Sri Lanka

The British All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Tamils expresses its serious concerns as violence in Sri Lanka has escalated to a new level. Over 5,000 people have been killed since beginning of 2006 and many thousands of people have been displaced due to the war.

Democratically elected parliamentarians, human rights activists, NGOs, journalists and innocent civilians have been targeted in the recent past.

Sunday's killing of a highly respected Tamil human rights activist and a religious leader Reverend Father M X Karunaratnam, the chairman of the North East Secretariat on Human Rights (NESoHR) should be strongly condemned by peace lovers within both the warring communities.

The British All Party Parliamentary Group for Tamils strongly condemns the assassination of such a Tamil religious/civil society leader. Killing of this nature is not acceptable whether it is Tamil or Sinhalese.

Reverend Father M X Karunaratnam has been a well recognised human rights activist who has been one of the main contacts for international human rights institutions in obtaining information on human rights issues within Sri Lanka, particularly from the North and East. This assassination has slammed the doors on efforts to improve human rights conditions and it is most regrettable.

This killing has come at a time when international organisations such as the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International etc. and major governments such as the US, UK, The European Union and the Indian Government have all raised concerns over the deteriorating human rights situation in Sri Lanka.

Whilst condemning this action in the strongest possible terms, APPG for Tamils also requests both parties to return to the negotiating table and honour the Cease Fire Agreement signed back in 2002. We also would like to share our deepest sympathies with the families and friends of those killed in the recent violence. We are very concerned for the safety and security of all citizens of Sri Lanka, and are very troubled about what the future holds for many of the minority Tamil community, who have been the victims of so many of the human rights violations in recent times.

APPG for Tamils also wants to make it very clear how important it is that Government of Sri Lanka heed to the widespread advice of the international community. This, at a time when the International Independent Group of Eminent Persons (IIEGP) has withdrawn from Sri Lanka complaining the lack of will from the Government of Sri Lanka in investigating major human rights violations. The APPG for Tamils will now be asking the British Foreign Secretary to consider what other action is available to the British government and to take all possible steps to ensure that Government of Sri Lanka plays by accepted international rules.

A political solution to the continuing conflict in Sri Lanka is as vital now as ever. There must be an end to the spiral of violence if the seventh decade of an independent Sri Lanka is to be one of justice, peace and prosperity.