



Global Tamil Forum

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UK calls for constitutional reform in Sri Lanka

“On this sacred occasion when people come together for the thirst of dignity, justice and freedom... you must stand tall and fight for your dream... you must keep marching and don’t give up... If they can do it in South of America, if they can do it in South Africa, it can happen for you, don’t give up”, Rev. Jesse Jackson, the veteran human rights campaigner closes the Global Tamil Forum (GTF) inaugural convention (from 24 February to 26 February), with his characteristic blistering speech, for departing international delegates and the British Tamils who attended the gala night on Friday, 26 February 2010 at the Grand Suite, Britannia International Hotel in London Docklands. Rt. Hon. Stephen Timms MP also addressed the ceremony and presented awards for members of the community for their invaluable contribution.

Addressing a gathering of more than three hundred British Tamils and the GTF delegates from around the world, Rev. Jesse Jackson shared an inspiring message of hope and lessons from history. He reminded the assembled audience of his personal journey to achieve equality and justice for African Americans. Rev. Jackson said that Tamils should learn from history that the struggle is hard but not to let go of the dream – be prepared to fight for their homeland. Referring to Rev. (Dr) S.J. Emmanuel, President of the Global Tamil Forum, Rev. Jackson said that “Father Emmanuel is the Archbishop Tutu of the Tamil struggle”.



Rev. Jesse Jackson with Members of UK Parliament.



British Prime Minister with GTF Delegates

GTF President and Councillor Yoganathan MBE

GTF held its inaugural conference on Wednesday, 24 February 2010 in the Houses of Parliament, Westminster, London. Delegates from 14 countries spanning 5 continents attended the conference which was addressed by UK Cabinet Ministers, Members of Parliament from all three main political parties, international delegates and civil society leaders.



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British Foreign Secretary Addressing the Conference
Justice Minister



British Shadow Foreign Secretary and Shadow
Justice Minister

Opening address at the conference was delivered by Rt. Hon. David Miliband, the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, in which he called for constitutional reform in Sri Lanka to facilitate an inclusive political process. "We continue to make the case that the President should use his mandate for a real drive for national reconciliation, a real drive to respect the rights of every single Sri Lankan, a real drive to fulfil the commitments, constitutional and other reforms, that would make a difference", he stated.

Delivering the closing speech, the Shadow Foreign Secretary, Rt. Hon. William Hague, also called for political reform in Sri Lanka and urged for an independent investigation into war crimes committed by all parties during the war, "we strongly urge President Rajapaksa's government to resolve the difficult political issues that remain and take immediate steps to address the concerns of the Tamil people and those of other minority groups. Meaningful political reform and reconciliation should be an urgent priority. This reform will only hold legitimacy if the democratic aspirations of all Sri Lankans, regardless of ethnicity, can be fulfilled."

Members from the delegation were also invited to meet with the British Prime Minister Gordon Brown. Prime Minister stressed the need for constitutional reform in Sri Lanka and assured the delegation of his personal commitment to take the Tamil issue to the international forum such as the European Union. Australian delegate thanked the Prime Minister, on behalf of Australia and the GTF, for his leadership in blocking Sri Lanka from hosting the next Commonwealth Conference and awarding the opportunity to Australia instead.

Amongst the UK and international dignitaries addressing the conference were Mr Sisa James Njikelana, African National Congress (ANC) Member of Parliament of Republic of South Africa, former MEP and Head of South East Asia delegation, Mr Robert Evans, Rev. Ven. Madampagama Assaji Mahanayake Thero from the Sinhala Buddhist community, a civil society leader Mr Abdul Majeed Mohammed Casim from the Muslim community in Sri Lanka, many UK cabinet ministers, shadow ministers and cross party MPs. Assistant Secretary of State, His Excellency Robert O'Blake, sent his representative to the event as an observer. At his request his message to the conference was read by the President of the GTF member organisation in the US (USTPAC). Royal Norwegian Government also sent one of their senior staff from the London Embassy to attend as an observer.



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Ven. Assaji Thero with British Foreign Secretary



Comrade Sisa Njikelana MP (ANC)

An inaugural magazine was released to mark the event in which, both Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary issued written statements. The Conservative leader, Rt. Hon. David Cameron MP, also sent a message of support for the days proceedings. Senator Robert P. Casey Jr. from the state of Pennsylvania was amongst the host of well-wishers such as many parliamentarians from the UK and around the world, the ANC, Royal Norwegian Government and the US State Department.

The Forum called for a worldwide economic boycott of Sri Lanka, by avoiding the purchase of Sri Lankan made products, investment and engagement in any economic activity that promotes the Sri Lanka regime against Tamils. It further renewed its pledge to support the internally displaced persons including children and the pursuit to bringing charges against people who had committed war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Working in solidarity with the Tamils and other communities in the island of Sri Lanka, GTF strives to restore Tamil People's right to self-determination and democratic self rule in their traditional homeland in the Island of Sri Lanka through democratic and non-violent steps.

Tamil delegates from around the world held internal discussions last Thursday, 25 February and Friday, 26 February in which a five year work programme was agreed to take forward the vision and mission of the GTF.

Speaking on behalf of GTF a senior delegate said "It is end of the war but not the end of the conflict. We reflected a lot on the developments since the end of the war before agreeing the work programme for the next 5 years. GTF will be pragmatic in its approach to realising its vision and mission - freedom for Tamils in the homeland".

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Notes to Editors:

Global Tamil Forum exists to harness the skills and the knowledge of the members of the forum, well-wishers and significant others including mainstream decision makers in the international governments, institutions and organisations with the aim of alleviating the sufferings of the Tamil community in the Island of Sri Lanka and to further their right to self determination within a democratic framework under pinned by international law, its covenants and conventions. The forum was set-up in 2009 with the support of many International Tamil community organisations. For more information and our mission and vision statements please contact info@globaltamilforum.org and/or visit: www.globaltamilforum.org