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“Eviction of Government of Sri Lanka from the UN Human Rights Council is a victory for humanity” – British Tamils Forum

As part of his address to a largely Sri Lankan expatriate community at the Oxford Union only a few days ago, President Rajapakse was quoted as saying “Ladies and Gentlemen, We have not hesitated to adopt global standards collaborate with international organisations such as the UN, ILO, and the Commonwealth and participate in efforts to consolidate institutions designed to protect the rights of our fellow humans. Sri Lanka has contributed with vigour and creativity to the development of the principals incorporated in international conventions through their work in international organizations and through the international Court of Justice. We have always played our part in global efforts to establish higher standards and to make our earth a better place for all because we fundamentally feel that this is the correct thing to do. This is a reflection of our cultural traditions” – **If only this was true, today, Sri Lanka would have been re-elected to the UN Human Rights Council!**

President Rajapakse was hailed as a genuine human rights activist when he came to power in November 2005. During the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna - JVP (People's Liberation Front) uprising against the government during the late 80s, Mr. Rajapakse took to the streets protesting against human rights violations of the then government in power. Since December 2005 till December 2007 it has been recorded that over 1,500 people have disappeared (Human Rights Watch report to UNHRC – Universal Periodic Review of Sri Lanka dated 05 May 2008).

“It is President Mahinda Rajapakse who taught us how to protest against disappearances” - HR activist Jayanthi Dandeniya - 25 March, 2007 (BBC Sinhala Service)

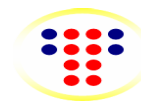
Nobel laureates Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel of Argentina, and Jimmy Carter of the United States each published statements, only a few days ago urging opposition to Sri Lanka's re-election bid to the UNHRC because of its abusive human rights record.

“Systematic abuses by Sri Lankan government forces are among the most serious imaginable,” citing widespread torture and extrajudicial killings. “Governments owe it to Sri Lankan human rights victims – and to victims of human rights abuses around the world – to ensure that the Sri Lankan bid fails,” Bishop Tutu declared only a couple of days ago.

“As Latin Americans know all too well, there are few crimes more horrible for a government to commit than summarily removing its own citizens from their homes and families, often late at night, never to be heard from again,” declared Esquivel. “Latin American governments can do a great service to the people of Sri Lanka by rejecting their government's candidacy for the Human Rights Council.”

“Numerous nongovernmental groups have raised concerns about Sri-Lanka's candidacy due to the country's deteriorating human rights record since its first election to the Council in 2006. For example, Sri Lanka has one of the highest rates of enforced disappearances in the world, with little or no discernable commitment to accountability.” - Jimmy Carter

British Tamils Forum



In a letter from the NGO coalition to the UN Human Rights Council, opposing Sri Lanka's candidacy - In the last two years, Sri Lankan government forces have been directly implicated in a wide range of serious abuses of human rights, and have failed to ensure investigations and bring those responsible to justice. These include:

- ❖ Hundreds of extrajudicial killings, including of humanitarian workers
- ❖ Hundreds of enforced disappearances, the highest rate of new cases recorded by the Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances in 2007
- ❖ Arbitrary arrests and long-term detentions without charge or trial
- ❖ Wide spread torture of detainees, "a routine practice ... both by the police and the armed forces" according to the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture.
- ❖ Forcibly returning internally displaced persons to unsafe areas
- ❖ Unwarranted restrictions on media freedoms, and threats and killings of journalists (3rd most dangerous country in the world for journalist – International Media Watch)
- ❖ Complicity with the recruitment of child soldiers by the Karuna Militia (Armed Paramilitary - TMVP)
- ❖ Denunciations and threats against human rights defenders and humanitarian workers

At the UK House of Lords on 30 April 2008, during an oral questions and answers session, the UK's Foreign Minister Lord Malloch Brown said that "there have been a number of tragic deaths of civilians and politicians in recent months in Sri Lanka. There has been a pick-up in violence, which is extremely alarming, and targeting of political leaders. We have been pressing - most recently in my speech to the Human Rights Council - for the High Commissioner for Human Rights to be allowed to open an office in Sri Lanka because we think it is enormously important to keep human rights observers and a broader international presence in that troubled country."

On behalf of all the victims (both Sinhalese and Tamils), the British Tamils Forum shares its gratitude to all the human rights activists, governments and organisations, particularly to the eminent persons mentioned above for their hard work and contributions which resulted in Government of Sri Lanka being unelected to the 47 member country UN HR Council.

However, even with such documented evidence available from credible international organisations, governments and eminent persons 101 out of the 192 countries voted in favour of Government of Sri Lanka's re-election to the Council. It is ironic that Bishop Tutu said "Governments owe it to Sri Lankan human rights victims – and to victims of human rights abuses around the world"

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Notes to Editors:

British Tamils 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 UK with the aim of alleviating the sufferings of the Tamils community in the Island of Sri Lanka and to further their right to self determination within a democratic frame work under pinned by international law, its covenants and conventions. The forum was set-up in 2006 when, with the support 88 British Tamil community organisations, it also published an open letter in the Times newspaper. For more information admin@tamilsforum.com and/or visit: www.tamilsforum.com