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British Tamils urge Commonwealth to take a firm stand Sri Lanka

Several hundred people gathered outside the Commonwealth Secretariat on Pall Mall, to urge a firm stand to be taken on Sri Lanka. The demonstration, by British Tamils, on Wednesday 4th March was held to coincide with the meeting of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), which addresses serious or persistent violations of the Commonwealth's fundamental political values.

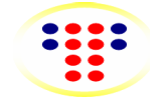
The crowd of protestors, dismayed by the silence of the international community against the Sri Lankan state's genocidal war on Tamils, and infuriated by the presence of the Sri Lankan Acting High Commissioner in London at the meeting discussing contravention of Commonwealth values and principles, chanted slogans and carried placards urging urgent action be taken by CMAG.

In the appeal to the Commonwealth Secretary General, the Chairman of the British Tamils Forum stated "The British Tamils Forum urgently appeal to the Commonwealth to take a firm stand on Sri Lanka, as a member of the Commonwealth, and urge them to agree to an immediate internationally monitored ceasefire to safeguard the 250,000 civilians currently in the war zone and facilitate negotiations for a just and permanent political solution." He went on to state "If the Government of Sri Lanka will not enter into a ceasefire, the British Tamils Forum and Tamils throughout the Commonwealth call on the Commonwealth to suspend Sri Lanka until such time as they accept an international monitoring mission and adhere to the international norms vis a vis human rights and international humanitarian law."

The attached Memorandum was handed by British Tamils Forum to a representative of the Commonwealth Secretary General. The British Tamils hope that the Commonwealth will uphold the values and principles they stand for, in the case of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka.

The protesters were supported by the presence of members of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Tamils; Siobhain McDonagh MP, Joan Ryan MP, Virendra Sharma MP, Andrew Pelling MP and Andrew Dismore MP.

British Tamils Forum



The APPG-T issued a statement reiterating the call asking Sri Lanka to be suspended from the Commonwealth. In their statement, they urge that “Sri Lanka should be put under permanent scrutiny and its government suspended from the Commonwealth until: 1) a ceasefire has been established; 2) it grants a UN monitoring mission unfettered access to the country; 3) it allows international aid agencies access to the Vanni region; and 4) it resumes peace negotiations.

Full text of the APPG-T issued a statement

As a signatory to the Commonwealth's Harare declaration, the government of Sri Lanka is committed to the defence of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. However, under the guise of a campaign of liberation, the Sri Lankan government has pursued a brutal military campaign in which it has shelled its own people, including in government-designated "safe zones", displacing, injuring and killing many thousands of innocent civilians. In the past two months alone 2,000 lives have been lost and as many as 5,000 have been injured. In the areas it has secured there have been reports of unlawful killings, enforced disappearances and other human rights violations. Dissent is treated as treason, criticism is violently suppressed and Sri Lanka is one of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists. Its conduct is, therefore, manifestly incompatible with the principles set out in the Harare declaration.

The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group - which meets in London today - was established in 1995 as the guardian of the fundamental values of the Commonwealth. But Sri Lanka has yet to feature on its agenda. Sri Lanka should be put under permanent scrutiny and its government suspended from the Commonwealth until: 1) a ceasefire has been established; 2) it grants a UN monitoring mission unfettered access to the country; 3) it allows international aid agencies access to the Vanni region; and 4) it resumes peace negotiations.

Last year Sri Lanka lost its seat on the UN human rights council over its poor human rights record. It is likewise incumbent upon the Commonwealth to exercise leadership on human rights.

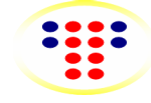
Joan Ryan MP, Siobhain McDonagh MP, Lee Scott MP, Virendra Sharma MP, Andrew Pelling MP, Andrew George MP, Andrew Dismore MP, Stephen Pound MP, Dr Phyllis Starkey MP, Eric Joyce MP, Neil Gerrard MP

External link to this letter, published in the Guardian:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/mar/04/sri-lanka-commonwealth-letter>

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British Tamils Forum



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