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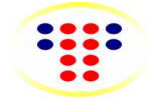
## **London Conference Reaffirms Tamils' Aspirations**

British Tamils Forum, assisted by the All Party Parliamentary Group for Tamils (APPG-T), hosted an international conference, titled "World Tamils Forum", on Thursday, 26 March 2009 at the Crown Plaza Hotel in London. Tamil academics, professionals and Tamil Youth from 22 countries attended the conference, at which Rev Jesse Jackson from the USA was the key-note speaker. The 45 delegates gathered over two days to discuss and draw up a declaration addressing the humanitarian tragedy facing Tamils in Sri Lanka, exposing the Genocidal War, reinforcing the need for a political process and the role that international actors would need to play.

The Former Defence Secretary and the Prime Minister's Special Envoy to Sri Lanka Rt. Hon. Des Browne, Former Lord Chancellor Lord Falconer, Labour National Executive Committee (NEC) Member Mr Mike Griffiths, Entertainer and Charity Worker Sir Jimmy Savile, Members of Parliament from the UK and Sri Lanka, Dignitaries and Civil Servants also attended the conference.

**All non-Tamil speakers at the conference commented that the Tamil Diaspora by grouping up in one place have demonstrated their formidable strength and the significance of the democratic approach to concluding their aspirations. They also commented that what is happening in Sri Lanka for the Tamils is unique and unacceptable. Unlike in the case of Darfur or even Gaza, the Sri Lankan Government expelled humanitarian agencies and international media long before the war intensified paving the way for a Genocidal war without witnesses.**

Prime Minister's Special Envoy to Sri Lanka, Rt. Hon. Des Browne, in his address highlighted that the often quoted figure of 70,000 killed is a gross underestimation of the lives that have been lost as a result of war in Sri Lanka. He further highlighted that the pressing need is the humanitarian crisis facing Tamil civilians remaining in the conflict zone. During his speech, Mr Browne acknowledged that the largest number of casualties continues to be in the government declared safety zone and strongly condemned these acts of violence. He conveyed that the UK government was doing everything it could to bring about a ceasefire ever since Prime Minister Gordon Brown called for it in the Parliament. In reference to his appointment as UK's special envoy to Sri Lanka, Des Browne explained that the intention of the appointment was to focus on alleviating the humanitarian crisis and facilitating a permanent solution. He expressed grave disappointment at the Government of Sri Lanka's decision to reject his appointment and reiterated that all parties to the conflict would need to be included in any peace settlement. He further said that unlike what the Government of Sri Lanka said after his appointment was announced, the British Government did consult the President of Sri Lanka and only announced after it was mutually agreed. "It is difficult for us to understand why they did this" He stressed that the idea of his appointment is to bring to bear his previous experience in the conflict in Northern Ireland. He also stressed that it is not the British Government's wish to enforce any solutions to the problem however he said that the parties to the conflict should resolve. Mr Browne emphasised that the conflict cannot be solved by military means and drew parallels to the Northern Ireland experience. He said that he has been engaged with the US State Department, Norway and Japan. India



he said needs to play a major role as the super power of the region. He further said that "today's meeting is significant" and that he will be reaching out to the Diaspora and the media. At the end of his speech he said that "the nature of my job as a special envoy means that I must be neutral, so I will not answer all comments".

In his keynote speech, Rev Jesse Jackson emphasised his strong commitment to establishing a ceasefire in Sri Lanka and the need for there to be dialogue between Tamils and the Sri Lankan Government to establish a permanent solution. **The world renowned Rights Activist highlighted the urgency in increasing international awareness of the crisis and expressed his support for upholding international law, human rights, economic development assistance and the right to self determination.** Rev Jackson stressed that he does not believe that violence is the way forward in any situation. He drew parallels between the freedom struggle of the African Americans in the United States of America and the Tamils of Sri Lanka. He asked everyone to see beyond the current circumstances and difficulties and have a vision of how things should be in the future; "Everyone must have hope and believe peace and justice is possible. Hope matters a lot." **Rev Jackson said that the international community has a moral obligation to act to stop the killing of innocent civilians. He stressed the importance of co-existence against co-inhalation.** Rev Jackson received the same standing ovation upon his exit, as he did when he entered into the conference room.

Other speakers included Former Lord Chancellor, Lord Falconer, who also answered many questions from the delegates. He suggested that the Westminster-style model was not suitable to the Sri Lankan circumstances where there is a long standing history of the majority suppressing the Tamil ethnic minority.

Mike Griffiths recognised Tamils' right to self determination and Sir Jimmy Savile expressed his support to the British Tamil community. APPG-T Parliamentarians Siobhain McDonagh MP, Keith Vaz MP and Simon Hughes MP, also addressed the conference supporting the Tamils right to self determination and supported the holding of a referendum. They all stressed the need for an immediate and permanent ceasefire and for immediate relief efforts to be made by the international community.

To conclude, the Tamil delegates passed a resolution by show of hands unanimously. A copy of the official resolution that was passed and selected photographs are attached with this press statement.

The press conference that followed was chaired by Ms Jan Jananayagam, Father S.J. Emmanuel and Mr A Pararajasingam. The conference drew to a close at 5pm.

- Ends -

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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](mailto:admin@tamilsforum.com) and/or visit: [www.tamilsforum.com](http://www.tamilsforum.com)