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Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka: Stop support for this genocidal war

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This is a story about a country where over 200,000 men women and children were displaced by war in a year; a country where 600,000 people from the minorities are confined and denied basic human requirements; a country where shelling and air raids are the only Christmas and New year fireworks for tens of thousands. In this country nearly 5000 have been killed within a year and nearly 2000 have been made to disappear within eight months.

The defence budget has been raised by 45 per cent to \$1.28 billion. Western governments, including the USA and Britain, help this country politically, economically and militarily.

[<https://npa31.org/IMG/jpg/govttroupsSL.jpg>]

The country is Sri Lanka, once hailed as the pearl of the Indian Ocean, now reduced to the teardrop of the Indian subcontinent.

Following a war that waged for nearly two decades the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) signed a ceasefire agreement (CFA) in 2002. With Norway as a facilitator, the parties started negotiations in the same year. The first round of talks was held in the Norwegian capital of Oslo.

The ensuing agreement signed by both parties stated that they "agreed to explore a solution founded on the principle of internal self-determination in areas of historical habitation of the Tamil-speaking peoples, based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka".

Since the last colonial rulers, the British, left Sri Lanka in 1948, this Indian Ocean Island has been ruled by the majority Sinhalese. Tamils today are nearly one fifth of the total population. While Sri Lankan Tamils dominate the North and East of the country, Tamils of Indian origin brought to the country by the British rulers for slave labour in the plantations live in the central up country. Muslims are the second minority in the country with a significant concentration in the East.

After tolerating many decades of racial discrimination by the majority Sinhalese governments The Tamils of the North and East rebelled in an armed uprising in the early eighties. The main trigger point was the state sponsored pogrom that massacred thousands of Tamils living in the Sinhala dominated south. Over 50 Tamil Tiger suspects held in a state prison in the capital Colombo was killed in one night. The Tamil militants came to the conclusion that enough is enough, took arms in the struggle for a separate homeland within the North and East.

The leftists in Sri Lanka were in the forefront of fighting for the rights of the minority nations from as early as 1935. The Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) was at the helm of these struggles. They had a respectable following among the Tamils of the North and the East as well as Tamil workers in the up country plantations.

However, the LSSP entered a coalition government in 1964 and abandoned the struggle for the minorities as well as the workers. Not only the Tamils but also the Sinhala youth were disillusioned. The Sinhala youth took up arms in 1971 in an abortive uprising while the Tamils followed suit at the end of the decade.

At the beginning several Tamil groups were fighting the Sinhala state. Nearly a decade later the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam or the Tamil Tigers became the major force fighting for the Tamil cause with Velupillai Prabhakaran as their formidable leader. From a hit and run guerrilla force it has developed into an army of conventional nature with its

dreaded Sea Tiger navy and Black Tiger suicide squad.

Since its inception in 1977, the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) that broke away from the LSSP, has campaigned for the Tamil peoples right for self determination. Several of the party's leading members along with other left wing leaders were assassinated in the late eighties by Sinhala racist forces. This was in a campaign to safeguard a limited power sharing arrangement in the form of provincial councils introduced by the bourgeois government at that time.

After many battles with successive Sri Lankan governments as well as the Indian army, the LTTE was able to liberate a major part of the North and a sizeable area in the East. The Tamil Tiger administration as well as its police force, courts and military is based the Northern Vanni region with Kilinochchi as its headquarters. The A9 highway that leads to the northernmost city of Jaffna held by the GOSL runs through Tamil Tiger controlled territory and is manned by state and rebel checkpoints.

From a strong military position the LTTE unilaterally declared a ceasefire on Christmas Eve 2001. The United National Party (UNP) led by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe, the champion of neo-liberalisation, reciprocated leading to the signing of the CFA. The major western power dealing behind the scene was Norway.

The CFA accepted the reality that the Tamil Tigers are in control of a de facto state. While the major opposition Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) led by President Chandrika Kumaratunge was highly critical of any dialogue with the Tamil Tigers, Sinhala right wing extremists led by red-clad Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and the Buddhist Saffron robed Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) took to the streets calling for war.

With Norway as the facilitator, the western powers helped the warring parties to start negotiations. The first round of talks started in 2002. With the progress of talks, the donor countries pledged an aid package of \$ 4.5 billion linked to the "progress of the peace process". To oversee the funds UK, USA, EU, Norway and Japan were appointed donor co-chairs.

Trincomalee, Sri Lanka's largest natural harbour is situated in the North eastern part of the country. This is part of the Tamil homeland. It also has a massive oil tank farm presently under the control of the Indian government. This is en route for the US Pacific command for the Middle East.

Strategically, the Trincomalee harbour and the oil tank facilities is an important location with regard to the US military war against the Middle East. Ironically, that part of the world is not "stable" enough for the US to be operating especially with Sea Tigers operating in the area. So the US wants a no-conflict zone in Sri Lanka's North Eastern seas, and the .peace. process it wants to impose is analogous to that Bush wants to impose on the Palestinians.

After six rounds of talks, in 2003 the Sri Lankan government had a meeting with the donors in Washington which excluded the Tamil Tigers. The Tamil Tigers suspended talks saying that any cash involved in the Sri Lankan scenario should be a matter to be discussed with both parties. The Sri Lankan government responded that it was a "sovereign nation".

Anton Balasingham chief negotiator and ideologue of the Tamil Tigers wrote to the prime minister saying "deprivation of the Tamils of the northeast in the macro-economic policies and strategies of the government have seriously undermined the confidence of the Tamil people and the LTTE leadership in the negotiating process".

The Tamil areas of the country were the most affected by the 2004 Asian Tsunami. Foreign agencies and shocked public in other parts of the world sent millions of dollars to governments in the affected regions. Tamils who sent aid

meant for the North and East saw them being stopped in custom warehouses.

In order to get much needed aid, the LTTE proposed a joint mechanism (PTOMS) in order to have a working relationship with the government. The president whose alliance came back into power in 2004 April stopped the PTOMS coming into effect. This move was backed by the JVP and the JHU. The Tamil Tigers sent delegation after delegation to Colombo to where all their appeals went unheard. The Tamils were left to perish in poverty and desperation.

Prior to the elections in 2004, a group led by the Tamil Tigers Eastern Commander Vinayagamoorthi Muralitharan, alias Karuna, broke away calling for an East separated from the North. The call for Tamil homeland even before the inception of the armed struggle has been a united North and East.

Later on Ranil Wickremasinghe's UNP went public to say that the split was engineered during the "peace talks". So much for "confidence building". It is no secret that the Sri Lankan military is operating together with the Karuna faction. In November 2006, both the UN and the Human Rights Watch accused the GOSL of recruiting children for the Kauna faction in the east.

The Karuna faction and the army had a major hit in February 2005 when they killed the LTTE Eastern political wing leader E Kaushalyan along with Former Tamil parliamentarian Chandranehru Arianayagam, in government held territory. Up to date no culprit has been found.

Western powers including the UN issued statements calling both parties to come back to the negotiating table. When the Foreign Minister Laxman Kadirgamar was killed in Colombo in August 2005 the EU imposed a travel ban on the Tamil Tigers. There was scant response from the left to the ban.

In 2005 November, President Mahinda Rajapaksa came to power mainly with the help of the JVP and the JHU. The Communist Party and the LSSP also supported him. His battle cry was a "Unitary Sri Lanka", which opposed any power sharing deals with the Tamil Tigers.

Violence that had been only sporadic during the previous three years escalated. The Mahinda Rajapaksa regime was preparing itself for war. The killing of unarmed Tamil political activists rose to new heights.

Tamil parliamentarian Joseph Pararajasingham was gunned down on Christmas Eve while he was attending mass. Witness saw the killers go into a Sri Lankan Army camp nearby. Before even a month had passed, V. Vigneswaran, President of the Trincomalee District Tamil Peoples' Forum who was to fill Pararajasingham's vacancy was also murdered.

Though no action was taken by international powers against the government that was implicated in both civilian murders, when the LTTE retaliated by launching a suicide attack against the Army Commander inside the Army headquarters itself, the EU imposed a total ban on the LTTE.

The GOSL responded to the attack against their military leader by bombing the LTTE held East by air. Since then, they have given priority to this campaign to oust the Tigers from the east. Air raids and shelling are part of the Tamil people's day to day life today. Hundreds of thousands of civilians have fled the area. Many brave the Palk Strait to neighbouring India to live as refugees.

Once an air raids hit a school in Sencholai killing more than 60 children while shelling by the SLA killed over 50 in a

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refugee camp in Kadiraveli in the east. The town of Trincomalee is today a city of refugees. With the blessing of the judiciary, the GOSL has already started dividing the Tamil homeland in the North and the east.

Meanwhile, the government has closed the main supply routes to the LTTE held North and East. While over a half a million Tamils in Northern Jaffna have been forced to live in imposed poverty where a massive military presence have occupied their land naming it a High Security Zone (HSZ), thousands are fleeing the eastern town of Tamil Tiger held Vakarai to escape the ever present shelling, air raids and non existence of essential items. No aid agencies or media are allowed to that region.

The so called "International Community" is silent. In the meantime, over two thousand mainly Tamils has disappeared within a period of eight months in the government held areas. The NSSP leadership, campaigning against these disappearances and attacks on Tamils, have received death threats from state sponsored Sinhala racist forces.

The most recent assassination was of Tamil parliamentarian Nadarajah Raviraj who was gun downed in the capital Colombo in broad daylight. He was a popular politician among the Sinhala majority, who told in Sinhala why the Tamils are oppressed because they are Tamils. He joined hands with the left and progressive forces of the Sinhala dominated South to campaign against disappearances and the atrocities committed against Tamils by the state and its paramilitaries. Thousands of anti-war demonstrators in Colombo protested his killing.

Maintaining that the ban on the Tamil Tigers was brought upon by the "actions of that organization", the EU in a statement on May 31 2005 calls upon the LTTE "to amend its violent course and return to peace talks".

While warning the Sri Lankan government against extrajudicial killings and sponsoring paramilitary groups, the EU only "calls upon the Sri Lankan authorities to curb violence in government held areas". This is while accepting that the LTTE is not the only party responsible for the violence rocking the island.

However, the EU that banned the LTTE in Europe for "their involvement in terrorist acts," has not taken any action against the Sri Lankan government led by Sinhala supremacist backed president Mahinda Rajapaksa's government for not acting effectively "to put a stop to the culture of impunity and to clampdown of all acts of violence in areas controlled by the government".

This conveys the message that the EU is aware of the government's sponsoring of armed gangs to launch a proxy war against the LTTE and Tamil civilians. Nevertheless, the EU is content by issuing a warning.

Almost half a million of Tamils roam the EU. They have been thrown out of their homeland due to their allegiance to the Tamil cause. They comprise a significant bulk of the European working class. Goaded by the US, the European global masters have labelled the Tamil militant leadership a "terrorist organization". The "International Community" that they believed to have a human face, have abandoned them in the onslaught of the governments terror campaign. The left in Europe and across the world must listen to their voice and defend their right to self determination.

Socialist Resistance, together with the NSSP, the Sri Lankan section of the Fourth International have launched a petition taking up these questions and demanding that the ban on the LTTE is lifted. [International Viewpoint is happy to promote that initiative.](#)

Trade unionists, civil liberty campaigners and other progressive forces should join together to defeat these anti- Tamil

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actions world wide as well as in Sri Lanka itself. It is time to rise against the global support extended to a state hell bent on launching this genocidal war. Sign the petition at <http://www.petitiononline.com/ntwsdtp/petition.html>