

Sri Lanka: Tamils must decide their Political Destiny through Referendum: TGTE will Accept their Verdict – Rudrakumaran.

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Tamils must decide their Political Destiny through a Referendum: Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam (TGTE) will Accept their Verdict – Rudrakumaran, Prime Minister.

1) QUESTION: In light of the present political situation in the country including the ongoing constitutional reforms process which seeks to provide a solution or solutions to the national question, the particular efforts of the local Tamil political representation in this regard, and most recently positive attempts towards reconciliation undertaken by certain Tamil Diaspora groups such as the Global Tamil Forum, what are the interventions made by the Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam (TGTE) in relation to Sri Lanka?



Visuvanathan Rudrakumaran, Prime Minister, Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam (TGTE)

ANSWEAR: The TGTE’s position is that the Tamil people’s sovereignty lies with them. Since the Tamil people did not participate in the 1972 and/or 1978 Constitution making process, they have not delegated their sovereignty to the Government in Colombo.

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If the Tamil population voted for a Unitary State or for Federalism or for a “non federal- federalism”, TGTE will accept that verdict.”

Visuvanathan Rudrakumaran

Thus, we believe as a priori for any political resolution today, the Tamil Nation should decide in what form they want to participate in that political resolution process. The TGTE’s position since its inception is that the Tamil Nation living inside the island of Sri Lanka and outside should decide on their political destiny, through peaceful and democratic means to

express their wishes, through a referendum.

The referendum that we envisage is not just for a yes or no vote for an independent state, but a referendum containing options such as a unitary state, a federal state, confederation and an independent state.

At our Conference marking the 40th Anniversary of the Vaddukoddai Resolution held in New York City

last year, a “Yes to Referendum” Committee comprising of academics and activists was formed. It is believed that they will soon come out with an action plan pertaining to holding a referendum.

2) QUESTION: In the context where there are many disparate, polemically opposed, ideological factions within the Tamil Diaspora who have a negative, pro-Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) connotation, locally however, especially among the Sinhalese, the TGTE are known as the torchbearers for the separatist, Eelamist cause. Does the TGTE hold strong separatist and/or nationalistic views?

ANSWEAR: I can say with confidence that there is a consensus among all the Diaspora groups that the Tamil national question should be resolved through referendum. Deciding our own political destiny through a referendum is a fundamental human right. Thus, it is not only a political issue but more importantly a human rights issue.

International practices also vouch for it. Whether it be South Sudan (Machakos Protocol) or the Good Friday Agreement or the Serbian - Montenegrin Agreement or the Papua New Guinea - Bougainville Peace Agreement, all mandate that national questions should be resolved through a referendum.

I must also mention here that when I say referendum I mean that it is a referendum for the particular nation not for the whole country. With respect to the Quebec referendum, for example, the Canadian Supreme Court did not say that the referendum should be held throughout Canada but only in Quebec.

At the same time, the TGTE believes that due to the rigid Sinhala Buddhist ethnocentric nature of the Sri Lankan state, only through independence can we live peacefully with dignity in the island of Sri Lanka.

Mass killings of Tamils and large scale rape of Tamil women in 1958, 1977, 1983, 2009 in Mullivaikal, and the latest reports of Rape camps of Tamil women run by Sri Lankan military, are a testament to this belief and conviction.

I also want to bring to attention the late journalist, Tarzie Vittachi’s book Emergency 58. This book was written immediately after the mass killings of Tamils in 1958. Vittachi, at that time, concluded his book by asking “Have the Sinhalese and Tamils come to parting their ways?” Tamils have been asking this question since the 1958 mass killings, and in the 1977 General Elections, they voted overwhelmingly to support the creation of a free Tamil Eelam.

However, I hasten to also add that if the Tamil population voted for a unitary state or for federalism or for a “non federal- federalism”, we will accept that verdict.

3) QUESTION: If the answer is yes in relation to separatism, does the TGTE not feel that this is contrary to the country’s best interests including those of all the communities residing within the nation?

ANSWEAR: We believe that an independent state of Tamil Eelam will contribute to friendly relations between all the communities residing in the island of Sri Lanka. The end is not to preserve the status quo or to preserve the existing borders but to create peace and friendly relations among the peoples of the island.

Moreover, we believe by having a permanent resolution in the form of an independent state we could

remove the racial bidding within the Sinhala polity as observed by Professor Donald Horowitz in one of his articles. The Sinhala leaders can focus on the day to day problems of the common man. It will also contribute to democracy and development.

An argument can be made that there will always be tension between Sri Lanka and Tamil Eelam. But we believe it need not be like that. There is no tension between Norway and Sweden or between Singapore and Malaysia. Even if there were to be some tension, there are more international legal principles and an international mechanism to manage it rather than for containing intrastate violence.

4) QUESTION: Is there a split or are there splits within the Tamil Diaspora?

ANSWEAR: As I said earlier, on the fundamental issues such as that the Tamils constitute a nation, that the North Eastern parts of the island constitute the traditional homeland of the Tamils, and that the Tamils should be allowed to realize their inherent right to self-determination there is no difference of opinion. I also admit some of the Tamil Diaspora groups believe that the Tamils' right to self-determination can be realized within the existing borders.

5) QUESTION: What is being done by the TGTE to mould the perception of the youngsters who were not born in Sri Lanka but were born to Sri Lankan Tamil parents, regarding the conflict which they experienced through the eyes and ears of their parents, relatives and friends, the current situation in the country and their future role in shaping Sri Lanka?

ANSWEAR: Through human rights discourse and cultural events, we instill their identity in the hearts and minds of the younger generation, about the Mullivaikaal Genocide, and the ongoing structural genocide, and their moral obligation to ensure that their kith and kin live with security, dignity and freedom.

As we see now in Geneva and even back home, Diaspora youth are playing an important role in ensuring that justice is done to our people. However, I must say more needs to be done.

6) QUESTION: What are the canvassing and lobbying efforts (financially and diplomatically) with which the TGTE is engaged in?

ANSWEAR: TGTE firmly believes that for any political move power is essential. We have seen that in present international relations and international law, non-state actors have become a power to be reckoned with.

The Foreign Affairs journal carries an article this month which refers to the world as tripolar: power is now exercised by democratic states, authoritarian states, and non-state actors. Non-state actors can bring certain actions on their own in the international political and judicial arena.

Thus, we are engaged in mobilizing the international community. In this regard, we successfully launched a 1.6 Million Signature Campaign calling for the referral of Sri Lanka to the International Criminal Court (ICC). We are now planning to launch another international campaign on August 30th, coinciding with the International Day of the Disappeared, mobilizing NGOs, political parties, educational institutions and all sorts of collective entities to seek truth and justice for the victims of disappearance.

7) QUESTION: Does the TGTE still believe in a LTTE resurgence? Does the TGTE advocate for terrorism?

ANSWEAR: TGTE's Constitution mandates that it should realize its political goals through peaceful means. I must also say that there is no legal impediment for the TGTE to function in any foreign countries. In fact, diplomats in various countries are directly engaged with the TGTE.

8) QUESTION: What does the TGTE make of the international community's, the West's and the United Nations' latest position with regard to the country?

ANSWEAR: Immediately after the Mullivaaikaal Genocide, the international community's position was that justice must be done to the Tamils and perpetrators of international crimes should be brought to justice. However, they were of the view that it was carried out by the former President Mr. Rajapaksa and a few other individuals. Thus, they brought the Sirisena Regime into power hoping that he will address accountability and the Tamil national question.

However, last month's damning report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Counter-terrorism and Human Rights has dispelled this illusion. Now the international community has started to realize that the state itself is the cause for impunity and the genocide of Tamils.

9) QUESTION: On the question of investigations into alleged war crimes committed by the Sri Lankan armed forces, how will the accountability for atrocities committed by the Tigers be achieved and what will be the intervention made by the TGTE in this regard?

ANSWEAR: The Tamils' fervent hope is to seek justice for the genocide committed in Mullivaaikaal. The TGTE's actions focus on that issue.

10) QUESTION: What does the TGTE make of the country's present situation?

ANSWEAR: As far as the situation of the Tamils in the island of Sri Lanka is concerned, when we look at the big picture, the structural genocide is still continuing.

Prisoners of War (POW) are still in detention. The army still occupies the Tamil homeland. There is no information about the disappeared, while torture and sexual violence is still rampant. There are reports by international human rights groups that Rape Camps of Tamil women run by Sri Lankan military are still operational. These camps are similar to the "Comfort Women" camps maintained by Japanese Imperial Army during the Second World War.

In the South, during the initial period of the Sirisena Regime there were some democratic measures introduced. However, now the Sirisena Regime in the South is also engaged in "democratic deconsolidation" like that of President Rajapaksa.

11) QUESTION: What is the state of reconciliation in the country?

My previous responses have answered this question.

12) QUESTION: Is the TGTE satisfied with the Tamil political representation (the Tamil National Alliance {TNA} and the Tamil Progressive Alliance)?

ANSWEAR: We understand the legal restraints on the domestic leadership to fully articulate the Tamil

political aspirations due to the 6th Amendment. In fact, the TGTE was formed specifically due to the militarization and the restriction of the political space within the island of Sri Lanka. The 6th Amendment prohibits calling for an independent state but it doesn't prohibit calling for the repeal of the 6th Amendment.

We want the Tamil domestic political leadership to bring this to the attention of the international community, rather than giving a wrong picture that Tamils no longer claim an independent state. They themselves know that this is not true. Mullivaaikaal has strengthened the call for an independent state. If anyone claims, especially after Mullivaaikaal, that the Tamils have given up the call for an independent state, it is a fake claim.

Moreover, we expect the domestic leadership to take some creative actions similar to the referendums organized by the Venezuelan opposition party and the proposed referendums in Iraqi Kurdistan and Catalonia. These referendums were not organized by the UN or by any foreign countries. These referendums were organized by local leadership.

13) QUESTION: Does the TGTE plan to contest at any future national level elections in Sri Lanka?

ANSWEAR: As I have stated on previous occasions, since the Tamils have not delegated their sovereignty to the Government of Sri Lanka we do not consider Sri Lankan elections as legitimate. However, we are willing to use these elections as a platform to advance our goals. For us to do that the 6th Amendment should be repealed.

14) QUESTION : Do you currently work with the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) or intend to in the future?

ANSWEAR: As I have stated earlier, we intend to work with the Government of Sri Lanka with respect to the logistics and timeframe for a referendum.

15) QUESTION: Previously, TNA MP President's Counsel M.A. Sumanthiran told us during an interview that if a solution to the national issue were to be brought in via a proposed new Constitution, they would guarantee Diaspora investment in the country for purposes of development. What do you make of this statement?

What is the investment (not solely monetary) the Diaspora is willing to make for the country? And what do you make of the present state of affairs with regard to the constitutional reforms process and the role of the Diaspora in it?

ANSWAER: As I have stated earlier, for any permanent political resolution, it should come through a referendum held for the Tamil Nation. Once a political resolution is obtained through referendum, then the Diaspora will bring its expertise in various fields as well as financial investment to entities in the island of Sri Lanka.

16) QUESTION: What do you make of the work done or the lack of it, whichever way you see it, by the Northern Provincial Council and elsewhere the proposition of a merger of the North and the East?

ANSWEAR: As we stated during the Northern Provincial Council election, we did not see and do not see that the Provincial Council can deliver anything meaningful. This view has now been corroborated by the Chief Minister Mr. Vigneswaran himself.

With respect to the merger, the Government of Sri Lanka acknowledged that the North Eastern part of Sri Lanka constitutes the Tamil homeland in the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord. The demerger occurred on technical grounds. If the Government of Sri Lanka, including the present government, is sincere about Tamil aspirations, they can simply remerge the with a simple majority. 2/3 majority is not necessary for the merger.

17) QUESTION: Please feel free to touch on anything else of importance to the TGTE you wish to highlight regarding aspects which have not been covered in the aforementioned questions.

ANSWEAR: The TGTE promulgated a Freedom Charter with the participation of more than 1 million people.

In the Freedom Charter, the distinct identity of the Muslims is recognized; education shall be compulsory and free for all. Tamil, Sinhala, and English shall be the official languages of Tamil Eelam. Health is recognized as a fundamental right; environment will be protected and emphasis will be given to renewable energy forms such as solar, wind, and wave, among others.

Moreover, since Tamil Eelam is strategically located in the Indian Ocean, it will also contribute to peace and harmony in the Indian Ocean.

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