

Tamils in the Homeland and the Diaspora Must Stand United

Amidst Sri Lanka's unprecedented economic and governance crisis, Tamils on the island and abroad must stand united on achieving long sought-after Tamil rights.

MARKHAM, ONTARIO, CANADA, April 12, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Markham, Canada – The current political crisis and the peoples uprising in [Sri Lanka](#) have caught the attention of the world in recent days. The Sri Lankan citizens on ground are calling on President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his 225-member legislature to step down, with the expectation that a regime change will salvage the country. However, in a televised address to the nation yesterday evening, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa not only made it clear that the ruling family will not be giving up power but also proceeded to make ominous references to how anti-government protests have been suppressed in the past.

While undoubtedly the economic mismanagement, entrenched corruption, and the downturn in tourism caused by the COVID-19 pandemic can all be attributed toward precipitating this crisis, one of the major underlying factors has been the vast and unjustified military spending used to oppress the Tamil people and the devastation caused by the 26-year long war that has contributed to the decimation of growth and stability in Sri Lanka.

The Tamil Rights Group (TRG) wishes to highlight to the world the following as major underlying causes among others for Sri Lanka's present crisis:

1. The total military spending by the Sri Lankan Government from 1983 to 2020 has been a staggering USD 33.76 Billion. This total amount constitutes of USD 14.91 Billion spent during the war period of 1983 to 2009 and then the USD 18.85 Billion spent during the period of 2010 to 2020, an increase even after the military conflict had ended.
2. Even for 2022 before the dire state of the economy was fully exposed, the government had



proposed a defence budget of USD 1.86 Billion for 2022, a 14% increase over the allocation for 2021. This plan was contained in the appropriation bill for 2022 (as presented to parliament during October) and according to the bill would have accounted for 15% of total expenditure.

3. The total capacity of the Sri Lankan military is over 300,000, with active personnel deployed being around 255,000. This capacity makes the Sri Lankan military the 17th largest in the world, bigger than countries such as Japan, Mexico, Ukraine, France, Iraq, Germany, Israel and UK.

The war perpetrated on the Tamils ravaged Sri Lanka's environment, economy and physical and social infrastructure, with the cost of the 26-year war being estimated at USD 200 Billion.

The situation in Sri Lanka is so desperate with people suffering without food, fuel, electricity and medicines, the Sinhalese population are turning out on the street in unprecedented numbers for the first time to protest vehemently against the President and Government that, earlier today, began defaulting on its foreign debt payments. They are demanding his resignation and a regime change which they think will resolve the problems. While TRG stands in solidarity with these people suffering in all parts of the island, we want to highlight the fact that inflicting grave sufferings on people is not a new phenomenon for this government. Successive Sri Lankan governments, including the ones led by the Rajapaksa brothers, have subjected the Tamil people continuously to severe oppression and hardships, perpetrating untold atrocity crimes including genocide of the Tamils for decades. Even after more than 12 years have past since the end of the military conflict which culminated with the mass killings of Tamils through the "Mullivaikkal massacre", the Tamils are continuing to be persecuted by the security forces who are conducting a de-facto military occupation of their traditional homeland in the North and East of the island.

As such the current uprising and unrest in the island nation was something expected. As a group advocating for Tamils' rights in the island of Sri Lanka, the TRG urges all the Tamil politicians on ground and all the organisations in the Diaspora, to be vigilant at this critical time and join hands to take combined action as required to ensure that any steps being taken to resolve this crisis are built upon a solid foundation and political reform that will deliver a just resolution to the Tamil national question.

In this context, we also emphasize that the current crisis in Sri Lanka is one that, the successive governments of the island nation have precipitated since independence in 1948, through anti-Tamil government policies, incitement of hatred, human rights violations, corruption, and mismanagement of public funds. The need to find this just resolution is now extremely urgent, due to the authoritarian and corrupt rule by a president militarising civilian functions and bringing Sri Lanka to this desperate financial crisis, which may push the country irretrievably into the hands of powers employing coercive diplomacy. This is not only creating a disastrous scenario for the future wellbeing of everyone in Sri Lanka, but also creating a serious threat to the security and stability of the region.

TRG urges the Tamils and the international community to stand in unison, in calling on the governments of India, the QUAD nations and other institutions such as the International

Monetary Fund to suspend any planned aid programs to Sri Lanka; until effective measures to address the following critical issues are negotiated and implemented prior to the commencement of any rescue program in Sri Lanka.

1. Accountability for surrenderers to the Army.
2. Demilitarisation with immediate withdrawal of troops from the North and East.
3. Immediate halt to land grabs and return of all confiscated land to the Tamils.
4. Repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA).
5. Immediate release of all political prisoners detained and convicted under the PTA.
6. Recognize Tamils' Right to Self-determination and initiate dialogue with stakeholders to find a just political solution for the Tamil National Question with guarantees of non recurrence under the auspices of India and the international community.
7. Ensure that as part of the resolution, the respective government must agree to an International Criminal Tribunal of Sri Lanka to progress justice for the victims of atrocity crimes in Sri Lanka, including Transitional justice and institutional reforms based on guarantees of non-recurrence.

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