

We Are Eelam Tamils - Sri Lanka Guardian Interview With Rudrakumaran, Prime Minister, Transnational Govt of Tamil Eelam

Rather Than Playing With Words Like Sri Lankan Constitution, Our Freedom Charter States "Tamil, Sinhala, and English shall be official languages of Tamil Eelam"

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Visuvanathan Rudrakumaran a New York based Attorney who served as the legal advisor to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, during the interview with Sri Lanka Guardian

Sri Lanka will not become an economically viable country without a political resolution to the demands of Eelam Tamils, Visuvanathan Rudrakumaran a New

York-based Attorney who served as the legal advisor to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, told Sri Lanka Guardian in an exclusive interview.

While recalling the memories of slain LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, he says that "his vision, his dedication, his determination, his passion, his resilience, are always with us."

Rudrakumaran is the prime minister of the Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam which is a transnational organisation among the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora which aims to establish Tamil Eelam, in the North-East of Sri Lanka. This interview is a part of our series of interviews with noted minds in Tamil Diaspora. The Government of Sri Lanka, recently, renewed its request in which they invited members of the Tamil Diaspora for political and social cohabitation.

FOLLOWING ARE THE EXCERPTS OF THIS INTERVIEW:

1) Question: Rudra, it has been a long time since we last communicated. Thank you for taking the time to sit with us. What latest updates can you offer us on your organization TGTE?



V. Rudrakumaran



Unlike Sri Lanka, which Places Buddhism as the Foremost Religion, Our Freedom Charter States that Tamil Eelam Shall be a Secular State and No Religion Shall be Given Foremost Place in Tamil Eelam.”

V. Rudrakumaran

Answer: Our main political program is that the Eelam Tamils, as a distinct Nation, have the right to self-determination and they should decide their political future through a referendum.

Today this vision is gaining acceptance in the international community. As you know, many former presidents, former UN undersecretaries and prominent academics regularly participate in our functions.

Our viewpoint is also finding resonance amidst the Tamil domestic leadership, despite the oppressive military environment and threat posed by the Sixth Amendment,

which penalizes peaceful advocacy for an independent state. I also would like to highlight the fact that in a letter sent by the Tamil parliamentarians to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights dated August 9th, 2022, have called for the repeal of the Sixth Amendment.

We will be soon filing papers with the registrar of the International Criminal Court acceding to the jurisdiction of the ICC in the state of Tamil Eelam. Our accession is based on the fact that the de jure state of Tamil Eelam exists. As you know, the Tamils did not consent to the 1972 as well as the 1978 constitution- our argument is premised on the international legal concept of reversion to sovereignty. In this connection, I would also like to state that the former UN high commissioner Al Hussain called upon the Sri Lankan state to accede to the Rome statute.

I would like to mention that the continued proscription by the Sri Lankan government of the TGTE, which is committed to establish the state of Tamil Eelam through democratic and diplomatic means, is testimony to our effectiveness in the pursuit of our goal.

2) Q: We heard that your father was a government servant who worked as the Mayor of Jaffna from 1979 to 1983 and passed away in 2020. What legacy did he leave for you to pursue?

A: My father was not a government servant. He was a successful criminal lawyer. He firmly believed that Tamils can live with security and dignity only in an independent Tamil state. He quit practicing law in 1983, since he refused to take oath expressing allegiance to the Sixth Amendment of the constitution. I would also like to point out, when he was the mayor of Jaffna, he refused to receive the then Prime Minister Mr. R. Premadasa. Honesty, sincerity, hard work, commitment to the cause, and commitment to the people, are the hallmarks of his legacy.

3) Q: Do you recognize yourself as the successor of slain LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran?

A: I do not consider myself as the successor of the Tamil national leader. I believe that no one can be a successor to our national leader. However, I feel I have a moral and political obligation to contribute effectively to the struggle. The Tamil national leader has elevated the Tamil struggle to the international plane and made the Tamil national question an international issue. His achievement/contribution and vision in the realization of Tamil aspirations for an independent state will guide us in moving forward to the end. Our national leader once said that the mode of our struggle might change, but not the goal. We will move forward with democratic and diplomatic means to achieve our goal. The fact that Sri Lanka continues to remain a racist, ethnocratic state only strengthens our resolve.

4) Q: Do you miss him?

A: His vision, his dedication, his determination, his passion, his resilience, are always with us.

5) Q: Let us consider the preliminary document prepared by the Advisory Committee of TGTE where you have reaffirmed that Mr. S J V Chelvanayagam is "Eelam Gandhi". Do you believe in non-violence?

A: I strongly believe in Peoples' Power. As I mentioned in the answer to the earlier question, we have adopted a non-violent path to achieve our goal. I would like to point out the tradition of sacrifice by Thilleeban and Annai Poopathi who also adopted a non-violent mode of struggle.

6) Q: What mistakes did the LTTE make?

A: The LTTE was committed to the Tamil cause that was not well matched with the interest of international powers. It can be described as a geopolitical conflict. Between the thirst of Tamils for an independent and sovereign state and the interest of the existing international powers. The reason for the way the war ended in 2009 was that the big regional and global powers did not want a new power center in the Indian Ocean. The powers did not want to make a change in the power structure and balance of power in South Asia and in the Indian Ocean. Given the present collusion between China and Sri Lanka, as demonstrated by the Hambonthota 99 years lease, the arrival of the Chinese submarine in 2014 and the arrival of Yuan Wang 5 last month, that position will surely change in the days ahead.

7) Q: The same preliminary report of your Advisory Committee lamented the plight of Muslims in Sri Lanka and advocated a secular state. But we don't see any Buddhist or Islamic representatives in your top committee of TGTE. Why?

A: prominent Sinhala human rights activist, Dr. Brian Senewiratne who happens to be a relative

of the former Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga, has been a prominent member of the TGTE Senate. In 2016, we recognized his contribution to the human rights of Tamils and gave him a "Lifetime Commitment Award".

In our Freedom Charter, promulgated with the participation of more than 100,000 people, rather than playing with words like in the Sri Lankan constitution, we stated in article 14 of the Freedom Charter that "Tamil, Sinhala, and English shall be the official languages of Tamil Eelam.

In the Freedom Charter, we explicitly recognized the distinct identity of the Muslims. Moreover, unlike Sri Lanka, which places Buddhism as the foremost religion, article 7 of our Freedom Charter states that Tamil Eelam shall be a secular state and no religion shall be given foremost place in Tamil Eelam. I must also say that a Sri Lankan Muslim academic also participated in the conference promulgating the Freedom Charter. We are also contemplating having a seminar with the Muslim community regarding our Tamil Eelam referendum campaign.

8) Q: You strongly believe that the only way Sri Lankan Tamils can protect their rights is to create a separate Tamil homeland. This position can be understood by assessing Sri Lanka's past records that you have no real intention to solve the problems of the common men and women in the North East but lag behind the unrealistic goal. Correct us if we are wrong.

A: I would like to first categorically deny the identity of our people as "Sri Lankan Tamils". We consider ourselves as Eelam Tamils and People of Tamil Eelam. Sri Lanka is a Sinhala, Buddhist, fundamentalist state that has systematically been engaged in structural genocide of Tamil people. An independent sovereign Tamil state is the only solution for safeguarding Tamil people from the genocidal policies and actions of the Sri Lankan state.

In fact, Ms. Michelle Bachelet, the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in her report issued 6 September 2022 expressed concerns about "the trend towards majoritarianism... former president Rajapaksha actively promoted a Sinhala Buddhist majoritarian ideology with the support of the military and Buddhist monks."

As the East Timor president and noble laureate, Dr Jose Ramos Horta at the fifth Mullivaikal Memorial lecture on May 18th 2020, stated "The ruling Sri Lankan state must ask themselves why Tamils are actively seeking a separate state and acknowledge what may be going wrong."

The scuttling of the P-TOMS by the Sri Lankan judiciary and the utter failure of the provincial council clearly demonstrates that until a political resolution is reached, economic development cannot happen.

I also take issue with your characterization that Tamil Eelam is an unrealistic goal. In fact, the continuation of Sri Lanka as an ethnocratic state, ruled in perpetuity by racist Sinhala elites is an unrealistic goal. The growing recognition of the fact within the international community that the

Tamils were subjected to genocide accelerates the process of realising our independence. Law and morality dictate that as a form of remedial justice in order to ensure “Never Again”, the formation of an independent state is the proper form of remedial justice.

I also would like to point out that given the fact that the island of Sri Lanka is situated in a strategically important place in the Indian Ocean, and it is the Tamils who inhabit two-thirds of the coastline, the evolving power dynamics should also be noted in this connection. As you know, since 1990, more than 30 states have been established. We believe that history is moving in the direction of Tamil people achieving their highest political aspiration.

9) Q: Do you hate Sinhalese? When was the last time you communicated with a Sinhala Buddhist?

A: Neither I nor other Tamil leaders and the Tamil people hate Sinhala people. Our struggle is against the chauvinistic and genocidal Sri Lankan state. I provide legal representation for many Sinhalese here in the US. Some of my Sinhala clients even seek my advice for their family matters. Some of my Sinhala clients have also stated, during the current economic crisis, that the reign over the whole country should have been given to Mr. Velupillai Pirabakaran. In their opinion he would have governed the country with honesty and discipline. I think you should check my reputation among the Sinhala and Muslim working-class diaspora in New York city.

10) Q: How do you read about the present economic meltdown in Sri Lanka?

A: The present economic meltdown is primarily caused by the atrocity crimes committed against the Tamils and the continued military subjugation of Tamils. The militarization of the country contributes heavily to the present economic catastrophe. The UN high commissioner, in her report dated September 6th 2022, stated that “the Defense Ministry was allocated – 354 billion Sri Lankan rupees (US \$1.86 billion) which accounted for 15% of the total government expenditure making it the highest allocated sector in 2022”.

Coupled with the above, the disrespect for the rule of law for decades has enabled corruption to go so deep that it has destroyed the Sri Lankan economy. Another related factor in more recent times has been the reliance on China for high interest loans for useless projects. The Covid pandemic and the war in Ukraine only tipped over a thoroughly rotten system.

11) Q: How can you support Sri Lankans to overcome the current challenge?

A: I take this question as how Tamils can support and overcome the current catastrophe. As we have stated earlier there first needs to be a political solution to the Tamil national question by holding a referendum to decide the political future of Eelam Tamils. I must state here that our

current referendum campaign does not hinge the consent of the Sri Lankan state. A referendum for independence in Kosovo was held without the approval of Serbia.

Sri Lanka will not become an economically viable country without a political resolution to the demands of Eelam Tamils. Such a solution will bring peace and prosperity for everyone. It will also motivate the Eelam Tamil Diaspora to invest in Sri Lanka also.

12) Q: The President has invited the Tamil Diaspora to be part of rebuilding Sri Lanka. We believe it's a great opportunity for you to put your feet on the ground and do something substantive. Would you like to communicate with the government?

A: I think the answers given to previous questions are relevant to this question too. When I left Sri Lanka in 1982, my intention was to finish my one-year master's degree and return to Sri Lanka. After the 1983 racial pogrom I felt that based on my credentials, I could contribute to the liberation of our people more effectively by being outside. Given the fact, there's no space for Tamils for justice or to articulate their political aspirations fully, it is imperative for me to continue to stay outside the island. I am sure I will return and put 'my feet on the ground' and that will be on the soil of an independent Tamil Eelam.

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