

Written by - Suren Surendiran -

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Global Tamil Forum (GTF) praises the adoption of the latest UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) resolution on Sri Lanka, which is a significant and historic step towards achieving truth, accountability and justice for the victims of the armed conflict on the island. International community must make it absolutely clear to President Mahinda Rajapaksa and his government what the consequences will be if they do not co-operate and/or wilfully obstruct the investigation. Since inception GTF has consistently called for an independent international investigation of alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by both sides to the armed conflict, which ended in May 2009. As an independent international investigative mechanism, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has been authorised to conduct a comprehensive inquiry in Sri Lanka, which will investigate the allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by both the Sri Lankan military and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) forces in the last years of the civil war. Tamils across the world are thankful to the United States for leading the three resolutions on Sri Lanka at the UNHRC, since 2012, and to all those co-sponsors and voting members of the Council who supported the resolution. GTF is also grateful to the role the UK Government has played, particularly the UK Prime Minister, Rt. Hon Mr David Cameron MP, for raising international awareness of the current plight of the Tamil people in the island during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Sri Lanka last November and since that time. We understand the hard work and commitment that has been undertaken by many diplomatic staff from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, the United States State Department and elsewhere to make this resolution a success.

It is also important to recognise the lobbying efforts of the democratically elected members of the Tamil National Alliance, Tamil Diaspora around the world, Tamils in Tamil Nadu, international parliamentarians, NGOs and especially all those Tamils, Tamil speaking Muslims, Sinhalese, Christian Clergy and others from within Sri Lanka, including southern civil society organisations, who have consistently called, and in many cases bravely, for accountability, reconciliation, negotiated political settlement and peace.

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GTF along with Parliamentarians from the TNA had made several visits to various capitals, lobbying for support, throughout the past few years. In a recent visit, last week to both Republic of South Africa and Botswana, members of TNA and GTF met with Deputy Minister for International Relations & Co-operation and Foreign Minister of the respective countries. Whilst South Africa has abstained in the voting to remain neutral to be a potential facilitator of any future negotiations for a political solution in Sri Lanka, it is with great pleasure and gratitude that we note, Botswana has voted in favour of the resolution this year, after abstaining for the past two consecutive times, since 2012.

Of the 47 current voting members on the UNHRC, 23 voted in favour of the resolution, 12 voted against and 12 abstained. Only 25.5% of the voting countries supported Sri Lanka, by rejecting the resolution. We were pleased to note that the attempts of a handful of voting countries, who are supportive of Sri Lanka, to postpone the vote and then to try to remove the portion of the resolution providing the mandate to the OHCHR for a comprehensive investigation did not succeed.

It is of paramount importance that the OHCHR is now given strong support to action this investigation immediately. We share the Tamil National Alliance's view that an inquiry should happen as soon as possible to ensure that further evidence of breaches of international law are not erased by the Government of Sri Lanka.

We urge the OHCHR to issue an authoritative public statement on how witnesses and their families will be protected in the event of those witnesses coming forward to give evidence to the inquiry. It is every affected Tamil person's responsibility to present their evidence, equally of non-Tamils including the Sinhalese people, as well as local and international organisations, governments and UN Offices to provide whatever credible evidences they possess, in order to make this international investigation as complete and comprehensive as possible. GTF will fully support in any way possible the endeavours of the OHCHR as it undertakes this important task.



PRESS STATEMENT 28 March 2014: Global Tamil Forum welcomes the latest UNHRC resolution on Sri Lanka

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