

## **APPG for Tamils Update**

Dear all,

Before we break up for Christmas I thought I would recap on what we had done so far this year and set out a few plans for future work for discussion.

### **AGM**

On 24 June 2015 we held our first meeting. We agreed our terms of reference. James Berry was elected Chair, Siobhan McDonagh was elected Senior Vice Chair, Joan Ryan, Wes Streeting and Richard Harrington were elected Vice Chairs, Tom Brake was elected Secretary and Jim Dowd Treasurer. We agreed our terms of reference, which are attached for convenience.

Richard Harrington had to resign his membership upon appointment as Minister for Syrian Refugees. At our next meeting I will propose that Paul Scully be appointed a Vice Chair of the APPGt.

### **Visit of Chief Minister of the Northern Province**

On 16 July 2015 the Chief Minister of the Northern Province, Justice C.V.Wigneswaran, visited the APPGt in Parliament. He was met by members of the APPGt and the BTF. He provided a briefing paper and focused his remarks on further political and economic devolution in the Northern Province, securing a proper accountability mechanism for human rights abuses and rebuilding the North and the East.

### **FCO Briefing**

On 9 September 2015 Michael Cockle and Tom Matlock from the FCO's Sri Lanka desk, briefed APPGt members, members of the BTF and representatives of Tamil human rights groups. The briefing focused on what the FCO's aims were in the forthcoming session of the United Nations Human Rights Council. The FCO has asked to meet with us again in the New Year (date to be confirmed).

### **Westminster Hall Debate**

On 15 September James Berry led a Westminster Hall debate, "This House has considered Tamil people's rights in Sri Lanka" in advance of the OHCHR's report into human rights violations in Sri Lanka. Minister Hugo Swire responded. A number of APPGt members spoke or intervened in the debate. A transcript can be found at:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmhansrd/cm150915/halltext/150915h0002.htm#1509155100002>

On 28 September 2015 The OHCHR published a damning report cataloguing human rights abuses by both sides in the Sri Lankan civil war. The report and the Sri Lankan government's response can be found at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/OISL.aspx>

### **Visits to UNHRC**

The UNHRC's 30<sup>th</sup> Session took place between 14 September and 2 October 2015. Wes Streeting, James Berry and Tania Mathias went separately to Geneva to speak with various

countries' delegations and human rights groups about the draft resolution on Sri Lanka and seek to have it strengthened.

Although the wording of the agreed resolution was less forceful than many of us would have wished, the FCO representative in Geneva and the representatives of other countries made it clear that unless a resolution was agreed with the Sri Lankan government, it was very unlikely indeed to be carried at a vote. The final resolution agreed on 28 September 2015 can be found at: [ap.ohchr.org/documents/E/HRC/d\\_res\\_dec/A\\_HRC\\_30\\_L29.docx](http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/E/HRC/d_res_dec/A_HRC_30_L29.docx)

On 20 October 2015 I asked an oral question about the resolution at FCO questions.

### **Visit of Gary Anandasangaree MP**

On 18 November 2015, recently elected Canadian MP of Tamil origin, Gary Anandasangaree MP, came to visit Parliament to understand how our APPG works, since he is considering setting one up in the Canadian Parliament. Gary suggested that we work together on some joint projects once the Canadian APPGt equivalent is established and I promised to discuss this with our Executive.

### **Work on submission to Sri Lankan government**

The Sri Lankan government stated, following the agreement of the UNCHR resolution, that it would consult with Tamil people and victims on the form of the proposed justice mechanism. Our BTF colleagues are aware of no such consultation so I propose that we, as an APPG, send submissions to the Sri Lankan government along with a document from the BTF. I will circulate the APPGt submissions in draft form to the Executive for their suggestions and agreement.

### **Letters & Responses**

I'm sure that members of APPGt have been writing to Ministers about Tamil related subjects. I wrote to Hugo Swire in advance of the UNHRC session. I submitted a written question on asylum seekers, the answer to which can be found [here](#).

### **Proposed future work for discussion**

- Finalising and sending our submissions on the form of justice mechanism
- Preparing a report on the implementation of the UNHRC resolution one year on (i.e. for publication in advance of the June September 2016 UNHRC session)
- Continuing to pressure the Home Office not to change its country guidance with respect to Sri Lanka for asylum seekers until there is credible evidence to merit a change
- Planning a Thai Pongal festival event in Parliament for January 2017
- Arranging a meeting with a representative from DfID for early 2016

### **James Berry MP**

Chair, APPGt

14.12.2015