

British Tamils Forum United Kingdom

Friday, May 20, 2011

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thousands Demand International Independent Probe in Sri Lanka

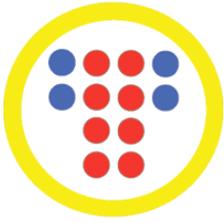
Despite torrential rain over twelve thousand people gathered in London's Trafalgar Square, on Wednesday 18th May 2011, to commemorate Tamil victims on the second anniversary of Sri Lanka declaring the war ended on the island and urge for an international independent investigation into war crimes in Sri Lanka. Over 40,000 civilians are feared to have been massacred during the final stage of the war alone and two years on, over 146,000 persons remain unaccounted for.

A damning UN Panel Report of 31 March 2011 surmised credible allegations of the Sri Lankan military campaign, between September 2008 and 19 May 2009, using "large-scale and widespread shelling, causing large numbers of civilian deaths". It also charged the Sri Lankan armed forces of repeatedly and knowingly shelling No Fire Zones, hospitals, UN hub, food distribution lines and near International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) ships involved in evacuating injured and their relatives.

The Rally was addressed by Rights Activists, prominent Members of the British Parliament, Members of the European Parliament, Trade Union representatives, International Lawyers as well as representatives from various community organisations. All those who spoke referred to the findings and recommendations of the UN Panel Report and pledged their support to strengthen the campaign for an **international independent investigation** into allegations of war crimes and the continuing human rights abuses in Sri Lanka.

The rally was organised by British Tamils Forum (BTF), with the support of various organisations, in a joint effort to:

1. Pay respect to their loved ones who were victims of the genocidal war in Sri Lanka
2. Call for an international independent investigation of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Sri Lanka
3. Call for a UN led humanitarian intervention to save the voiceless Tamil people now languishing without any means of subsistence in the highly militarised North and East of Sri Lanka



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Lee Scott, Conservative MP for Ilford North and Chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Tamils, pledged to take calls for an International Independent Investigation to the UN.

“Those who have committed crimes must be brought to justice”, he said. “Tamil people must be in control of their own destiny”, he further stated.

Simon Hughes, Deputy Leader of Liberal Democratic Party, urged that “other countries must not be allowed to veto an international inquiry” and called on the Commonwealth to “do the right thing” by the Tamil people, if it is to be seen to be upholding democracy and human rights.

Robert Halfon, Conservative MP for Harlow, pledged to do everything in his power to help those who have suffered **genocide**.

Claude Moraes, Labour Member of the European Parliament, spoke of the recent emergency debate held in the EU and the resolution that was adopted by the European Parliament on Sri Lanka urging the Sri Lankan government to implement the recommendations suggested by the UN panel of experts and conduct a genuine investigation.

Sarah Ludford, Liberal Democrat Member of the European Parliament, Sadly there is no sign of willingness on the part of the government to launch a proper inquiry, in which case the EU and others must push for an international mechanism”.

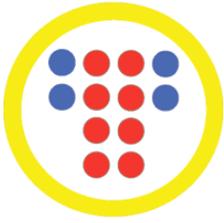
Roger Evans, Conservative member of the London Assembly, compared the massacre of Tamils to Srebrenica genocide and urged that “it is important that the UN not just to do justice, but for justice to be seen to be done”.

A BTF initiative, ‘open your “**I**’s campaign’ signifying the call for an **I**nternational **I**ndependent **I**nvestigation was launched at the rally to take the campaign to all corners of the UK.

John Mann, Labour Member of Parliament for Bassetlaw, said he was "privileged" to be the first politician to sign the “I campaign” and urged all elected politicians to join the campaign for an international independent inquiry.

Dr Andrew Higginbottom, Principal lecturer in Human Rights at Kingston University, called the Mullivaikal Massacre a “planned genocide”.

Martin Powel Davies, National Executive of the National Union of Teachers, pledged the support of the trade union for the rights of self-determination of the Tamil speaking people.



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Jeremy Corbin, Labour Member of Parliament for Islington North, reminisced how he had joined Tamils in London when protesting against the riots against Tamils in Sri Lanka in 1983. Referring to the present situation in Sri Lanka he said “military occupation is not the same as peace”.

Tim Martin, Director of Act Now, launched a celebrity-backed Global campaign to the members of the UN Human Rights Council calling upon them to support and take forward the call for an international independent inquiry to the UN Security Council.

John Rees of Stop the War Coalition reiterated that “the international community and major powers had failed to intervene” in Sri Lanka. He called for an international independent investigation and pledged support for a boycott of Sri Lankan Cricket.

A memorandum was delivered to the UK Prime Minister, RT Hon David Cameron MP, to further the call he had made in October 2010 for an independent investigation into the allegations of war crimes and human rights abuses in Sri Lanka and to seek:

1. An International Independent Investigation; and
2. A UN-led humanitarian intervention to save the Tamil people from starvation.

-Ends-

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Notes to Editors:

British Tamils Forum exists to harness the skills and the knowledge of the members of the forum, well-wishers and significant others including mainstream decision makers in the UK with the aim of alleviating the sufferings of the Tamils community in the Island of Sri Lanka and to further their right to self determination within a democratic frame work under pinned by international law, its covenants and conventions. For more information admin@tamilsforum.com and/or visit: www.tamilsforum.com