

# British Tamils Forum United Kingdom

Monday, 02<sup>nd</sup> February 2014

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **The All Party Parliamentary Group for Tamils and the British Tamils Forum Host Annual Dinner 2015 in London**

Activists, journalists, religious leaders, politicians of all parties and prominent members of the British Tamil community arrived at the Royal Horseguards Hotel in London on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January 2015 for the annual dinner of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Tamils (APPGT).

The event began with a minute silent to remember those killed in the conflict in Sri Lanka and a traditional Bharatanatyam dance performance and welcome speeches by Mr V Ravi Kumar, General Secretary of BTF, and Lee Scott MP for Ilford North and the chair of the APPGT who apologised to the Tamil Community for not heeding their cries in 2009 and failing to prevent the genocide.

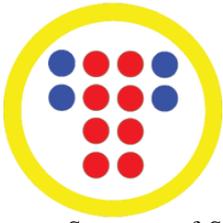
Mr Ravi Kumar reminded the seated guests that the recent change of government in Sri Lanka does not alter the Tamils' position that they are the victims of genocide under successive Sinhala dominated governments. He also thanked the media in the UK, particularly Channel 4 News and Callum Macrae, for helping expose the Sri Lankan state's actions to the outside world. Mr Ravi Kumar maintained that Tamils believe an end to the genocide is not possible without a fundamental restructuring of the Sri Lankan state and its institutions and without the recognition of the Tamils' right to self-determination. Pointing out that the new government has promised to protect the military - which continues to occupy Tamil lands - and those in the previous government from the threat of international justice, Mr Ravi Kumar called on the international community to resist the new Sri Lankan government's call for more time. Mr Ravi Kumar also drew attention to the continued military occupation of Tamil lands on the island.

Throughout the dinner, guests heard impassioned speeches from Secretary of States, Ministers and the APPGT members of all parties, including the Secretary of State for Energy & Climate Change Ed Davey, MP for Bassetlaw and member of the Treasury Select Committee John Mann, MP for Mitcham and Morden and the APPGT Vice-Chair Siobhain McDonagh, the Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor Chris Grayling, the Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Ivan Lewis, MP for Harlow and Treasurer & Secretary for the APPGT Robert Halfon, MP for Carshalton and Wallington and the Deputy Leader of the House of Commons Tom Brake and MP for Croydon Central and the Government Whip, Lord Commissioner Gavin Barwell. Guests also saw a video message from the Leader of the Opposition Ed Miliband and Prime Minister David Cameron's message read by Nick de Bois MP.

Common themes in these speeches included praise for the Tamil community's role in the United Kingdom and for its hard work and success in raising awareness of the plight of Tamils in Sri Lanka. The Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor Chris Grayling said that parliamentarians of all parties were proud of their relationship with the Tamils.

Several politicians expressed regret that they and many in the UK establishment did not heed the fears of UK Tamils in 2009 that an atrocity was imminent and that they were focused like never before on making sure that it would never happen again. Some MPs went as far as to say openly that they believed genocide had occurred in Sri Lanka; all accepted that Tamils were the victims of serious human rights violations and that it is right that there be a war crimes investigation.

During their speeches, and during interviews given to the media beforehand, MPs and MEPs agreed that the change of government in Sri Lanka does not mean that their work is over. They urged the UK Tamil community to maintain its work, and promised to continue their own effort until true justice and accountability is achieved. The Shadow



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Secretary of State for Northern Island, Ivan Lewis MP, insisted that only a solution which recognises the right to self-determination of the Tamil people would be acceptable. Charles Tannock MEP told the media before the event

that the EU's GSP+ trade concessions, which Sri Lanka was stripped of in 2010, will not be reinstated until actual improvements are seen to the lives and rights of Tamils, despite any changes in government.

We also had Secretary of States, Ministers and many members of APPGT attended in solidarity with British Tamils in the UK, including the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Hon Theresa Villiers MP for Chipping Barnet, Huw Irranca-Davies MP for Ogmere and Shadow Minister for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP for The Cotswolds, Bob Blackman MP for Harrow East, Mr Virendra Sharma MP for Ealing Southall and the Vice Chair for the APPGT, Stephen Pound MP for Ealing North, Mike Gapes MP for Ilford South and Steve Baker MP for Wycombe.

The London Assembly members Roger Evens, Dr Onkar Sahota and Navin Shah were also attended and supported the British Tamils' campaign to bring justice to the victim of war crimes and crimes against humanity and a lasting political solution to the ongoing conflict in the island of Sri Lanka.

The final speech was delivered by Dr V Tharmaratnam, a Tamil doctor who was trained and practised in the de facto state of Tamil Eelam. He explained how innocent civilians were persecuted during the final stages of the war in 2009. He spoke movingly of the horrors he witnessed at that time and how he still suffers from PTSD and flashbacks today. He described how his hospital was repeatedly shelled by the Sri Lankan army, even though the LTTE had, at his request, moved all weapons far from the hospital site and the hospital had clearly been marked out by Red Cross flag and ambulances parked outside. He reminded those present that the subjugation and abuse of Tamil people by the Sri Lankan military still continues and urged the UK to do its best to bring about a demilitarisation of the North.

There was a united voice among all politicians, NGOs, media representatives, religious leaders and the British Tamil Community for the justice of victims of the genocidal crimes against Tamils and a political solution to address the root cause to the conflict by recognising Tamil people's right to self-determination in the North and East of Sri Lanka.

-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

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