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PRESS STATEMENT – PRESS STATEMENT – PRESS STATEMENT

British Tamils vow justice for victims of war crimes

Over 10,000 British Tamils, Parliamentarians and well-wishers gathered at Parliament Square on Tuesday 18 May 2010 between 4pm to 8pm to observe remembrance for the tragic loss of nearly 40,000 Tamil lives lost during the Sri Lankan army's final offensive last year. In bleak contrast to the 72-day parliament protests last year, this gathering was far more sombre, recalling the atrocities that could not be averted by the international community and reflection on the ongoing sufferings of their kith and kin in Sri Lanka.

Gathered with their loved ones, young and old, the crowds adorned in black, paid their respects by laying flowers on a mock tomb below the statue of Sir Winston Churchill. The memorial event was well attended by UK cross-party MPs, councillors and community representatives.

"There should be an international independent investigation into the war crime charges against the Government of Sri Lanka. I think Tamil community need control of their own destiny and for the Sri Lankan government to allow the rights of all Tamil community to be protected and I will fight to achieve this." – Lee Scott, Conservative MP for Ilford North

"The last year has proved to many people that the Sri-Lankan government is incapable of meeting the political needs of the Tamil people. It has committed war crimes and grossly violated human rights. I pledge my continuing support to the Tamil people in their fight for political and human rights in Sri Lanka." - Virendra Sharma Labour MP for Ealing and Southall and Chair of All-Party Parliamentary Group for Tamils

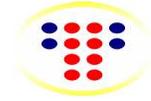
"I believe that Tamils are entitled to freedom, democracy and self determination. Every person who believes in democracy will fight for the rights of Tamil people." - Robert Halfon Conservative MP for Harlow

"We have a new obligation as the parties in government, I promise that we will work with our friends in EU, Commonwealth and UN to bring peace and justice in Sri Lanka. I will work with my party to urge the present government to issue a statement as soon as possible urging for an independent investigation into the war crime charges in Sri Lanka and prosecution." - Simon Hughes Liberal Democrat MP for North Southwark and Bermondsey

"We had so many debates in Parliament to end the Sri Lanka's violence against its own people. Under the statue of Winston Churchill we renew our pledge to ensure a proper and full enquiry into war crimes so that those who lost their lives may rest in peace knowing they did not die in vain" - Keith Vaz Labour MP for Leicester East

"There have been a lot of evidence of atrocities committed against the Tamil people and we want to make absolutely sure that justice is delivered to the perpetrators of these atrocities. We have

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influence on government now and we want Britain to uphold the highest standards in human rights.” - Andrew George Liberal Democrat MP for St Ives and the Isle of Scilly

Other speakers included Tom Brake Liberal Democrat MP for Carshalton and Wallington, Barry Gardiner Labour MP for Brent North, John Mann Labour MP for Bassetlaw, John McDonnell Labour MP for Hayes and Harlington, James Allie Liberal Democrat Councillor for Brent, Robert Evans former Labour MEP, Julian Bell Labour Councillor and Leader of Ealing, Mr Gupta, General Secretary of Hindu Council UK, Vicki Sentas of CAMPACC, Graham Williamson of Act Now and an eye-witness account from a survivor. Steven Baker Conservative MP for Wycombe, Gareth Thomas Labour MP for Harrow West and Stella Creasy Labour MP for Walthamstow also attended the memorial.

At 6pm representatives from British Tamils Forum and Tamil Youth Organisation handed a memorandum to the Prime Minister’s official Residence, 10 Downing Street, calling on the British Government to use her leverage on trade through permanent withdrawal of GSP+ and prevention of IMF loan to exert pressure on the Sri Lankan government to uphold international law to protect the Tamil people. British Tamils called on Britain to use her standing in the commonwealth, European Union, the UN, as well as her influence on other powerful nations to ensure an independent international inquiry into the war crimes committed against the Tamil people during the war is initiated to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Similar memorials are being held across the world to mark the tragic loss of a people who could not be safeguarded by international law and are now a community in danger in their own homeland. International Crisis Group, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have renewed calls for an independent international investigation into gross human rights violations and repeated violations of international law during the final stages of the war. Channel 4 News aired new evidence from a senior Sri Lankan army commander and frontline soldier that point-blank executions of Tamils were carried out under orders from their senior officer. Against this backdrop, the Government of Sri Lanka continues to defy international calls for an independent war crimes probe and has declared this week to be a period of celebrations with Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa receiving acclaim as the ‘architect of victory’.

A candlelight vigil concluded the remembrance service at Parliament Square as the crowd pledged oath to continue to voice for the silenced victims until the perpetrators of war crimes against Tamils in Sri Lanka are brought to book. Diaspora Tamils vowed to help their voiceless kith and kin, who survived the horrors of onslaught but must continue with their shattered lives, until Tamils achieve peace with justice and dignity in their homeland.

- 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 Tamil community in the Island of Sri Lanka and to further their right to self determination within a democratic framework underpinned by international law, its covenants and conventions. For more information admin@tamilsforum.com and/or visit: www.tamilsforum.com