



British Tamils Forum United Kingdom

19th of March 2021

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UK Parliament debate on Sri Lanka

- ✓ **Right to self determination** ✓ **Recognition of Genocide** ✓ **ICC referral**
- ✓ **Evidence collection mechanism** ✓ **Prevent cycles of violence** ✓ **Tamil Kingdom**
- ✓ **Global Human Rights Sanctions Act (Magnitsky act)** ✓ **Arms export & Trade deals**

In the UK parliament, the Back-Bench Committee Debate on Sri Lanka took place on 18/03/2021 organised by Siobhain McDonagh MP and co-sponsored by Rt Hon Sir Ed Davey MP and Elliot Colburn MP. This debate focused on the human rights situation in Sri Lanka and its ongoing serious atrocity crimes with persistent impunity. They spoke of the war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide which occurred during the war period as well as the ongoing human rights abuses in the North and Eastern provinces perpetrated by the Sri Lankan Government. There was widespread discontent observed in the debate regarding the current developments in Sri Lanka and many suggested bilateral and international actions to hold Sri Lanka accountable.

We thank Cross-Party Members of Parliament who have regularly championed the plight of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka including Siobhain McDonagh MP, Wes Streeting MP, Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP, Rt Hon Sir Ed Davey MP, Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, Rt Hon Theresa Villiers MP, Shadow Foreign Minister Stephen Kinnock MP, Sam Tarry MP, Gareth Thomas MP, and Elliot Colburn MP. The British Tamils Forum (BTF) has frequently communicated and comprehensively outlined the issues the Tamil people keep facing in Sri Lanka, to these Members of Parliament.

We also thank inspiring points and questions put forward by MPs including Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi MP, Dr. Matthew Offord MP, Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP, Bob Blackman MP, Rt Hon John McDonnell MP and Dawn Butler MP on crucial subjects including the potential application of the Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime Act (Magnitsky Act) to perpetrators listed by the OISL (Office of the High Commissioner of the UN Human Rights Council Investigation on Sri Lanka) report in 2015. Questions and statements were also put forward by MPs from wider regions of the United Kingdom including Taiwo Owatemi MP, Anna McLaughlin MP, Margaret Ferrier MP, Anthony Mangnall MP, and Jim Shannon MP.

Despite the restrictive parameters of the Covid-19 pandemic, Tamil Community continues to work towards a robust shift in UK Policy on Sri Lanka and a tangible accountability and justice process. This debate took place just four days ahead of the day of voting on the currently tabled UNHRC Resolution on Sri Lanka, raises an extremely vital question, on what the role of the UK Government will be on addressing the present human rights crisis in Sri Lanka, and the path that should be taken to ensure nonrecurrence of violence and, for the safety and security of the future of the Victims in Sri Lanka.



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Siobhain McDonagh MP initiated the debate, supporting the British Tamils' request for the referral of Sri Lanka to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Dawn Butler MP recommended for the 'Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to appoint a Special Rapporteur to continue to monitor Sri Lanka for ongoing violations.

Wes Streeting MP and Rt Hon Theresa Villiers MP, who joined us at the UN Human Rights Council sessions regularly, remarked on their experience of the-March 2020 UNHRC session just before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. They both raised key points regarding justice and accountability and advocated for international and bilateral actions. Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP, who was also ready to join us at UNHRC, Geneva in March 2020, but we advised him not to travel due to the cancellation of the session, showed his support for an international evidence collecting mechanism. He stated that an 'evidence-gathering element is crucial to maintain material for the international accountability which Sri Lanka has resisted for so long.

Rt Hon Ed Davey MP condemned the British Government for continuing its arms exports to Sri Lanka and encouraged the government to look into the 'Magnitsky-style sanctions against individuals involved in perpetrating human rights abuses and implicated in the OISL report 2015.

Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, showed his support to the Tamil people in Sri Lanka and the diaspora who continue to look for their family members after 'enforced or involuntary disappearances'. He further stated what action the Government is taking to prevent future cycles of violence and to promote autonomy for the Tamil community in Sri Lanka. Now is the time for strong international action, led by the UK once again, to secure justice for the Tamil community, recognition of the genocide and a proper accountability mechanism.

Shadow Foreign Minister Stephen Kinnock MP condemned the government for ignoring human rights when it comes to trade and rewarding Sri Lanka with the benefits of the GSP+. He questions the government asking 'now that the UK has left the EU, will the government be reassessing their trading relationship with Sri Lanka?'

These are only a few of the many strong statements put forward by the Members of Parliament that supported Tamils today in the debate. Over the past year, especially, we have been meeting with Members of Parliament to prepare for the debate regarding upcoming international resolutions.



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Rt Hon John McDonnell MP said “As my hon. Friend for Ilford North said, we should also recognise that the adoption of the resolution does not preclude individual countries like ours from taking additional unilateral action. I believe that this country has a special responsibility for action as a former colonial power. We united the three kingdoms, one of which was a Tamil kingdom, into one country and then left in 1948.”

The debate has been concluded with a resolution as follows:

“That this House notes with concern the reports of a systematic attack in Sri Lanka on democratic governance, the rule of law and human rights including renewed discrimination against the Tamil and Muslim communities; is profoundly concerned that the Sri Lankan Government has refused to investigate accusations of war crimes including by key members of the current government and has withdrawn from the UN Human Rights Council Resolution 30/1; welcomes the significant leadership role played by successive UK Governments at the Human Rights Council and urges the Government to provide clear policy direction and leadership to ensure a new substantive resolution is passed at the upcoming Council session in March 2021 that will enable continued monitoring by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and mandate a mechanism to gather, preserve and analyse evidence of violations for future investigations and prosecutions; and calls upon the Government to develop a consistent and coherent policy to assist the Sri Lankan people through its trade, investment and aid programmes, and in its diplomatic and military relations.”

We again thank all of the Members of Parliament who attended for their contributions. We hope that together we can achieve truth, justice and accountability.

Full text version of the debate: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-03-18/debates/115768C9-C3D6-4942-B880-44AEA1A545F9/SriLanka>

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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 info@britishtamilsforum.org and/or visit: www.britishtamilsforum.org