



British Tamils Forum

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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

British Tamils reiterate call for UK Government to boycott CHOGM in Sri Lanka

In a recent meeting with Rt. Hon Alistair Burt MP – the Foreign Office Minister responsible for South Asia, British Tamils expressed their disappointment at the Prime Minister David Cameron's decision to visit Sri Lanka in November 2013, for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM).

In the meeting, which was facilitated by the British Tamils Forum, Tamil representatives from a number of Tamil groups based in the UK explained to the minister the reasons why the UK Government should reconsider its decision to attend CHOGM in Sri Lanka. They further reasoned that this Commonwealth summit in Sri Lanka would be against the fundamental political values of the Commonwealth and the Commonwealth charter signed by the Queen on Commonwealth Day this year.

The delegation explained the culture of impunity, lack of accountability and continuing structural genocide against Tamils in Sri Lanka - describing both historical and current events and discussing their moral and legal ramifications. They criticised the UK's role in the failure to protect Tamils in 2009 and the failure to bring Sri Lanka to account ever since – a failure that sets the conditions for continued abuses with impunity by the Sri Lankan state. The Minister was sympathetic to the concerns expressed by the Tamil representatives but differed on the suggested course of action to address these concerns.

The delegation also pointed out to the minister the failure of the UK's strategy: soft diplomatic engagement and influence has still not delivered justice to the victims though the war ended over four years ago.

The Minister, in his response declined the delegation's suggestion for a boycott or venue change for CHOGM 2013 stating that the UK Government has made a decision on attendance which reflects the importance of the Commonwealth as well as the opportunity for attendees to see the situation on the ground. The Minister underlined that the CHOGM meeting and attention it attracts, would shine a spotlight on Sri Lanka and highlight progress or the lack of it. The UK Government had been clear on its concerns for example supporting the resolution at the March Human Rights Council and would remain so in the run up to CHOGM.

The delegation raised the following questions for the UK Government to consider on behalf of the British Tamils;

- Is the Prime Minister's decision to attend unconditional, whatever the outcome of UN High Commissioner Navi Pillay's report in August and Northern Provisional Council Election in September?
- What are the UK government's plans, post-CHOGM?
- Why doesn't the UK include charge of genocide in their discourse?

British Tamils Forum will continue to engage with the UK Government and will seek justice through an International Independent Investigation into war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of genocide in Sri Lanka.

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