



British Tamils Forum United Kingdom

23 July 2023

40th Anniversary of July 1983 anti-Tamil Pogrom in Sri Lanka held in the UK Parliament

- The many failed commissions of Sri Lanka, including the current Truth & Reconciliation Commission (TRC), have all been set up to deceive the international community.
- Call the British government to sanction perpetrators of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide following the example set by other countries.
- The Credibility of President Ranil Wickremasinghe, who is the nephew of J R Jayawardena, the man who oversaw the anti-Tamil pogrom in 1977 and 1983, is being questioned.
- Chinese influence in Sri Lanka should be curtailed.
- Speakers committed to stand united to prevent genocide in future.
- Tamils should have their right to self-determination in their homeland.

On behalf of the British Tamil community, the British Tamils Forum (BTF) convened the 40th anniversary observance of the Black July pogrom on 19 July 2023 in Committee Room 10 in the Parliament of the United Kingdom, hosted by **Rt Hon Sir Stephan Timms, MP**.

Sir Stephen Timms, being the member of Parliament for East Ham since 1994, has always been voicing against the atrocity crimes inflicted on Tamil people by the Sri Lankan state and attending UNHRC meetings in Geneva with British Tamils Forum to reinforce the international community support for the justice and accountability for the victims of the war crimes, crime against humanity and genocide. His last visit was to the 51st UNHRC Session in March 2023.

BTF panelist on Failed Commissions and the upcoming TRC Model in Sri Lanka

The Government of Sri Lanka has a long, long history of setting up these “justice mechanisms” whenever there is a national issue that needs addressing – it is the very first thing the Government does. Yet to date, none of these commissions have led to any meaningful legislative or executive reform whatsoever. The recommendations of each successive commission have never been implemented. This has led to a culture of impunity among the security services personnel; we have seen perpetrators of human rights violations walk free every single time.

They’ve been setting up many such Commissions since 1977, such as the “**Sansoni Commission**.” Several commissions were set up to investigate premeditated massacres and enforced disappearances from 1989 to 2005; however, the reports of the commissions were either not made public, or the Government did not take any action upon hearing the findings of the commissions. That’s not to mention the mother of all failed commissions - the **Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC)**, set up in 2010 at the end of the Civil War. Human Rights lawyers slammed this particular commission, as it was not independent of the Government, did whatever it could to downplay allegations of human rights violations, and did not provide protection to witnesses giving evidence. We are yet to see a commission that has delivered justice to victims of governmental wrongdoing.



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In her speech to the United Nations Human Rights Council on the 21st of June, 2023, the **UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights** said: "Sri Lanka has witnessed too many ad hoc commissions in the past that failed to ensure accountability." She specifically mentioned the Office of Missing Persons, which has "not achieved the results that provide satisfaction to victims." In fact, the Office has failed to solve even a single case, of a missing person.

Under the provisions of the Commissions of Inquiry Act of Sri Lanka, a Commission of Inquiry is a "fact-finding" mission – no judicial powers are granted to them. It just so happens that the same model is used for every commission relating to human rights abuses.

The President can decide whether a commission's findings should be made public, whether partly or fully, owing to reasons related to (quote) "national security". But this provision has been misused by successive governments to hide incidents of serious human rights violations and protect the names of the perpetrators. To top it off, it is the President alone who decides whether they want to implement recommendations of a Commission of Inquiry. This is but a taste of the many fatal flaws that the Commissions face. The commissions are not given the tools to enforce their recommendations, leaving the government and its security services free to do anything they like.

The many failed commissions of Sri Lanka have all been set up to deceive the international community. There have been far too many sham commissions set up to waste everyone's time. Sri Lanka has been using these commissions to ensure the international community does not get involved; the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is yet another attempt at this tactic of stalling. The oppressors will continue to be in power and lead the TRC whilst the oppressed remain oppressed and will cease to exist in the future.

The Tamil Community has been calling for an international independent justice mechanism with the power to prosecute war criminals and human rights abusers. It is our firm belief here at the British Tamils Forum, that if there is to be any form of justice for the victims of human rights abuses in Sri Lanka, an international Criminal Justice Mechanism into the wrongdoing of the Government is required.

Among many other things, Sir Stephen, in his speech, explained the importance of setting up an international independent inquiry and clarified why the British government should take steps to sanction perpetrators of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide following the example set by other countries.

Executive Director of the Oakland Institute, USA, Anuradha Mittal's video presentation about the persistent violence and identity annihilation of the Tamils, with the focus on land grabs, was displayed. Eyewitness accounts of an international Diplomat and two other victims and a documentary film about the anti-Tamil Pogrom in 1983 in Sri Lanka produced by our sister organisation **USTAG** narrated the horrendous violence perpetrated against Tamils. This documentary portrayed Indra Gandhi's statement, "**There is a Genocide of Tamils in Sri Lanka.**" She immediately dispatched her external affairs Minister Narasimha Rao to Colombo. Rao saw with his own eyes the violence and requested the then President J R Jayewardene, "**Can you stop this violence, or shall we stop it?**". This was the message from Prime Minister



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Indra Gandhi to J R Jeyawardene. JR replied, "We will do it ourselves." The violence, which had been **going on nonstop for 4 days, came to a halt in a matter of hours.**

Subsequently, many other Members of Parliament of all major political parties shared similar views and widespread discontent with the further deterioration of the Tamil people's situation in Sri Lanka, especially since the 1983 Black July pogrom.

The First Chair of APPG for Tamils when BTF initiated and became the Secretariat of the APPG for Tamils and Vice-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Tamils, **Mr Virendra Sharma MP**, added that he would be committed to protecting the human rights of Tamils in Sri Lanka, and throughout the world in his speech.

The Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG For Tamils), **Mr Elliott Colburn MP**, said that he would continue to fight along with his Parliamentary colleagues to recognise the genocide, sanction war criminals, and find justice for the Tamil people.

Mr Ben Morris, from **Sri Lanka Campaign**, in his speech, stated that various commissions hitherto set up by the Sri Lankan governments had gone nowhere, Mr Ben questioned the credibility of the current President Ranil Wickremasinghe, who is the nephew of J R Jayawardena, the man who oversaw the anti-Tamil pogrom. He also posed the question, 'how can one expect justice from President Ranil Wickremasinghe, a cabinet minister since 1977 and was in J R Jayawardena's government's cabinet'?

The inference of Mr. Ben's concerns reflects what underlies the quote of the then Sri Lankan President J R Jayawardene at an interview with Ian Ward, the editor of London Daily Telegraph on 11 July 1983, two weeks before the state-sponsored the Black July 1983 Anti Tamil Pogrom.

"I am not worried about the opinion of the Jaffna (Tamil) people now. Now we cannot think of 'THEM'. Not about their lives or their opinion on 'Us'.... The more you put pressure in the North, the happier the Sinhala people will be here... really, if I starve the Tamils out, the Sinhala people will be happy..."

Martyn Day MP, Scottish National Party's Spokesperson for Health in the House of Commons: Spoke about the Genocide of Tamils and assured that he would stand in solidarity with Tamils.

Sarah Olney MP, Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for the Treasury, Business and Industrial Strategy and Vice-Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Tamils criticised the inadequate response from the international community during the atrocities committed against the Tamils. She, on behalf of her party, called on ***the British government to recognise the atrocities committed against the Tamils as Genocide.*** Sarah Olney also said that the **cycle of violence against the Tamils** must come to an end.

Bob Blackman MP (Conservative), Vice Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Tamils, Conservative Friends of India and British Hindus: After describing the Sri Lankan government's attempt to wipe out the Tamils as genocide, added that the Muslim community in Sri Lanka was also badly affected by the Sri Lankan State. By further adding that the ***Chinese influence in Sri Lanka*** should be curtailed, Bob Blackman said that India and Britain would have important roles to play. After mentioning that economic



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sanctions should be applied to force the Sri Lankan government to come to the negotiating table., Bob Blackman confirmed his continued support for the Tamil for achieving their aspirations.

Sarah Champion MP, Chair of the International Development Select Committee and a Member of National Security Strategy: After expressing her concern that the Black July 1983 was something none of us could forget, extended her solidarity to the Tamils to get to the truth as to what went so horribly wrong and why and how it was orchestrated. Stating that it would be difficult to move forward to prevent it from happening again and that prevention would be the one important to her, Sarah added that she would stand united to **prevent genocide** in future.

A video of the **Mayor of Brampton, Canada Patrick Brown's** interview to the British Tamils Forum was displayed at the event, where Patrick Brown upon describing the **atrocities committed against the Tamils as genocide**, said that the war criminals should not only be sanctioned but also should be tried in an international Court of Justice and put in prison for the rest of their lives. It is construed that Patrick Brown's strong view has been that the Tamils should have their **right to self-determination in their homeland**.

Referring to the UK being the pen-holder of the core group on Sri Lanka at the UNHRC in Geneva, the UK's reluctance to impose sanctions against the perpetrators of the war crimes, the crimes against humanity and the genocide but, in lieu, continuing to trade with Sri Lanka Mayor Patrick Brown expressed that **a democratic country like the UK should not set a poor precedent by tolerating Sri Lanka's human rights abuses**. He added that tens of thousands of Tamils were butchered by the Sri Lankan war criminals and should not be swept under the carpet.

In short, there was consensus amongst dignitaries that what has hitherto happened and **what is continuously happening to Tamil people in Sri Lanka is genocide**. Ranil Wickremasinghe showing a reconciliatory face to the world, is stealthily carrying out a genocidal agenda in a multifaceted fashion against Tamils in Sri Lanka. Under his leadership, Buddhist statues spring up in Tamil areas where there are no Buddhists living or ever lived. Tamil lands are being taken over under the pretext of archaeological research. **Successive governments have used things like irrigation projects to settle Sinhalese people in predominantly Tamil areas as a way of colonisation**.

The United Nations Human Rights Council's current resolution, which is not time-barred, is very clear in its mandate to collect evidence, analyse and prepare case files for future prosecutions for the atrocity crimes committed in Sri Lanka.

President Ranil Wickremasinghe's latest ploy to protect war criminals is the advent of yet another commission akin to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission used in South Africa after the end of Apartheid. His attempt to hoodwink the international community is widely described as half-witted that challenges the intelligence of world leaders like President Biden, Chancellor Scholz, President Macron, Prime Minister Sunak and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The meeting concluded with the following notes of the moderator.

- It has become very clear that the application of the TRC model in Sri Lanka, after a lapse of 14 years of ending the war is another hoax to hoodwink the international community and prolong the justice for the victims of the war crimes, the crime against humanity and the genocide.



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- It is a ploy to deceive the international community to jeopardise the strong UNHRC Resolutions 46/1 and 51/1 merely to protect its perpetrators of the war crimes, the crime against humanity and genocide.
- It is therefore imperative that an international criminal prosecution mechanism is paramount to establish the accountability and justice.
- Sri Lanka domestic commissions had always proved to be ruse and so the TRC be.
- We are in the crucial stage to strengthen the Sri Lankan Accountability Project (SLAP). We must endeavour to collect evidence to use in judicial proceedings.
- Two years since the start of the SLAP and there has been no public report on the progress, a comprehensive report for the public should be published without delay.
- The North and East of Sri Lanka as a war affected region torn apart by 30 years of civil war and neglected by all the Sri Lankan governments before and after the war. Resettlement, Reconstruction, Rebuilding the economy of North and East in par with other regions of Sri Lanka are the need of the hour.
- The Sri Lankan government has not carried out a comprehensive need assessment survey in the war affected North and East region. Thus, an interim administration must be set up to do this in the North and East by elected representatives immediately.
- This interim administration must conduct civil, political, and economic affairs and address the issues of ongoing land grab, intimidation and harassment of civilians and civil society. This interim administration should focus on resettlement and reconstruction to stop Tamils being forcibly pushed into poverty and dependency.
- To avoid history repeating itself institutional restructuring is needed including a socio economic and political contract between the Tamil Nation and Sinhala Nation, arbitrated by the international community for peaceful co-existence.
- To ensure non-recurrence the Sri Lankan security forces need to be demilitarised from the North and East as well as demobilised in the island.
- Sri Lanka will continue to be a pawn for global powers to exploit if serious structural changes are not carried out immediately. This sensitive island will experience more violence, more conflicts and be without peace and prosperity.
- Any future mechanisms must be international and support the judicial process. Member states must also take meaningful action for criminal prosecution and set up an International criminal justice mechanism.



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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