

உலகத் தமிழர் பேரவை Global Tamil Forum



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New Year Message from Global Tamil Forum (GTF)

The start of a new year offers an important moment to reflect upon the year passed and to look forward with hope for the future.

Too often in recent years, optimism in a better tomorrow for Sri Lanka and for the Tamil people in particular, has been misplaced and our hopes were not fulfilled. However, GTF hopes that 2014 brings with it the realisation of at least some of the fundamental aspirations of our people. One among them is the demand for an independent, international commission of inquiry, which can credibly investigate the conduct of the final months of Sri Lanka's armed conflict. The team behind the Nobel Peace Prize-nominated 'Sri Lanka's Killing Fields' documentaries and the 'No Fire Zone' film, released in 2013, as well as Channel 4 news deserve special praise for uncovering further evidence of alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity. The establishment of such a mechanism, under UN auspices, is imperative to ensure truth and justice for the tens of thousands who perished, as well as to help lead the way towards a brighter future on the island.

It is clear that international patience is wearing increasingly thin, with the Government of Sri Lanka's unwillingness to address the alleged violations of international humanitarian and human rights law arising from the conflict and for the on-going perpetration of human rights abuses, particularly in the heavily militarised north and other parts of the island. We welcomed the adoption of the 2nd resolution by the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), in 2013, which called for further measures to be taken to enable reconciliation and accountability in Sri Lanka. We supported the decision by the Indian, Canadian and Mauritian Prime Ministers to boycott the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Colombo, in November, given President Rajapaksa's failure to address these issues. Also last year, we noted, with great sadness, the damning analysis of the worsening human rights conditions on the island, by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Hon. Ms Navi Pillay.

Impeachment of the Chief Justice without following due constitutional process, the Weliveriya killing - militarily suppressing the democratic rights of people to demonstrate, growth of religious intolerance against faiths other than Buddhism, suppression of freedom of expression, including attacks on independent media, seizing of private land by the military and government and the alarming increases in sexual violence against vulnerable Tamil women, particularly in the heavily militarised north and east are some of the appalling human rights conditions suffered by the people of the island.

The visits to the Tamil majority North of the island, conducted by the UN Human Rights Chief, in August, and by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Rt. Hon Mr David Cameron MP, during CHOGM, brought much needed international scrutiny to the plight faced by the people of the region.

The marginalisation and subjugation of Tamils and Tamil speaking people, including Muslims through militarisation and intimidation, must stop. GTF salutes the courage shown by Tamil citizens who, despite risking harassment and intimidation from Government forces, were willing to stand in support of truth and justice and express their concerns to these dignitaries regarding the ground realities on the island.

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The clear political mandate given by the Tamil people to the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), at the elections to the Northern Provincial Council in September, strengthened our hopes for the future. The decisive victory sent an important message to the Government of Sri Lanka and the international community. The TNA now has the right and the responsibility to implement its manifesto. We hope that the Provincial Council will be given the opportunity to address at least some of the pressing needs of those in the area. We have developed a strong collaborative working relationship with the democratically elected Tamil leadership in Sri Lanka and we will continue to actively engage with the TNA and help to strengthen their voice in the international arena in 2014.

We have and will also continue to establish working relationships with various political and non-political organisations in the south of Sri Lanka.

The deteriorating situation in Sri Lanka must change and change now! GTF urges all members of the international community – governments, parliamentarians, civil society organisations and concerned citizens alike to back the demand for an independent, international inquiry into the allegations of breaches of international law by both parties to the armed conflict and to support the initiation of a comprehensive political settlement. President Rajapaksa's regime should be given no further allowances at the 25th Session of the UNHRC in March 2014 to subvert, deliberately prolong or undermine the accountability and reconciliation processes by insincerely suggesting a process of "Truth and Reconciliation Commission" with a clear intent to hoodwink the international community.

Looking ahead for a better and prosperous new year, let us all strive to dedicate ourselves to work for peace and reconciliation for all in Sri Lanka based on truth, justice, accountability and a negotiated political settlement.

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Notes to Editors:

Global Tamil Forum (GTF) was established in 2009 by a number of grass-roots Tamil groups following the end of the armed conflict in Sri Lanka. It is the largest Tamil diaspora organisation with members drawn from five continents. GTF is absolutely committed to a non-violent agenda and it seeks a lasting peace in Sri Lanka, based on justice, reconciliation and a negotiated political settlement. For more information please contact info@globaltamilforum.org and/or visit: www.globaltamilforum.org