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Tamil Writers Guild - The CJT Thamotheram Lecture on Saturday, 24th April 2010:

"A strategic review of the democratic political options for the Global Tamil Diaspora functioning as the legitimately constituted arm of the Tamils of Eelam".

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

We are starting today on what it is hoped will be an annual discourse on matters pertaining to the rights, aspirations and collective responsibilities of the Tamil Diaspora from Eelam, instituted by the Tamil Writers Guild in the name of and in commemoration of the work of the late and respected Mr CJT Thamotheram. I wish you every success in this endeavour. At the time of his passing, he was the doyen amongst leading Tamil intellectuals and political activists in the United Kingdom who throughout his adult life used his profound intellectual and networking skills to bring expatriate Tamils living in the UK together in order to make common cause with the situation and plight of the Tamils of Sri Lanka.

In the 1960s, when CJT started his work the world was largely unaware or would not care about the draconian measures taken by the post-independence Sri Lankan governments to suppress the Tamils living in peace and equality in the country for over 2,500 years. Successive majoritarian Sinhala governments rode roughshod over Tamil rights and legislated for the supremacy of the Sinhala people, their language and Buddhist religion. They degraded the Tamils into second class citizens who had little or no rights to higher education, employment or aspirations to the higher echelons of political or economic life.

I would like to say a few words in context about CJT. He had the perspicacity and intelligence to understand that the growing numbers of Tamil migrants, many of them academics or professionals arriving in the UK and elsewhere as a result of the pogroms against them in Ceylon, should not be allowed to become disillusioned in what would appear to be an alien environment to them. He was endowed with the natural leadership, energy and intelligence of a School Head of Mathematics to draw similar minded English speaking Tamils together into different organisations that he founded over 40 years to bind them together with the Tamils in the homeland in their struggle and to strengthen Tamil kinship in the UK and to broaden their interests and appeal.

He founded the first English newspaper for the Tamils called the Tamil Times that was to cover political news and opinions relating to the Tamil cause in Sri Lanka as well as covering some aspects

of Tamils social and cultural events in London. Later he co-founded along with others a major charitable organisation, the Tamil Methodist church, a Tamil school, a think tank, and a club for Writers in English; all of which benefited immensely from his enthusiasm and guidance, and especially his networking skills to identify people and to raise funds for deserving Tamil causes. For the record, I would like to mention a few of these organisations: Tamil Times, SCOT, Tamil Methodist Church, West London Tamil School, ITF and the Tamil Writers Guild who today are hosting this occasion. He was indeed a great and humble patron and servant of the Tamil people and it is only appropriate that we are launching the seminal talk of the annual CJT Thamotheram lectures today, with his widow Mrs Florence Thamotheram and his family present here with us.

The title for my talk can be divided into two parts:

1. **A strategic review of the democratic political options for the Global Tamil Diaspora**
2. **...functioning as the legitimately constituted arm of the Tamils of Eelam**

I would like to take the second part first, solely to establish the reason why the Tamil Diaspora has the moral, political and legitimate right and sacred duty to consider itself as the proper interlocutors for the cause of the Tamils of Tamil Eelam. A dictionary meaning of 'legitimate' is to be able to defend with reasoning. The tragedy of the Tamils in Eelam where more than 100,000 Tamils were mercilessly slaughtered in a genocidal war, has left the Tamils traumatized, displaced and their leadership has been ruthlessly decimated. These Tamils are now captives in the hands of the Sinhala army and government, and do not have the freedom, or capacity to express their aspirations, needs, fears and wishes freely and without threat or coercion. The jackboots of the Sinhala army are on the throats of the Tamils. President Rajapakse is busy getting the army to plant thousands of Bo trees, the powerful symbol associated with the Buddha, in all of the main intersections in the traditional homeland of the Tamils. This is followed by the construction of Buddhist temples in a territory that has been for 2,500 years devoutly Hindu by character. Tamil homes that were deserted by the owners at the time of the vicious military attack on them, are now being offered by the government to the Sinhala soldiers, thereby changing the demography in a fell swoop.

What passes for pseudo democratic elections in Sri Lanka are rigged elections in which the main Sinhala political parties use organized violence, threat, intimidation, appeal to rabid nationalism and engage in corrupt practices to pervert the course of free and fair elections in the country.

The State through manipulating the appointment of partisan senior policemen and Elections Officers to the polling districts ensures that the political ruffians and the criminal elements that threaten and maim voters during election times are protected from prosecution. Supreme Court Judges who toe the government line are appointed to the bench and if anyone shows any independence of thought or action, they will be excoriated by the servile political media and the 'rent a mob' street demonstrators.

In April last year because our Foreign Secretary David Miliband along with other EU Foreign Secretaries had called for the Government of Sri Lanka to desist from attacking the hapless and defenceless Tamil old people and children assembled in a small area in the Vanni, government thugs and Buddhist monks took to the streets of Colombo ranting against David Miliband and Gordon

Brown. They hung effigies of Miliband and Brown across the streets of Colombo and burnt them to vent their fury.

One of the main presidential candidates, General Sarath Fonseka – the former Army Commander, who is no shrinking violet himself on humanitarian issues, has said openly that he will testify in a proper court of law as to who ordered the massacres of the civilians and the surrendering Tamil military leadership. The implication in this statement is that it was on the orders of the President or his brother the Defence Secretary Gothabaya Rajapakse. The despotic President and his brothers have arrested this 4 star General who garnered over 40% of the popular votes like a common criminal, bound to the chair that he was seated on. We must tell the world of the sheer criminality of Sinhala politics and why the Tamils cannot hope to get justice from the politics of the abattoir practiced by the ruling elite.

It is this tendency to political and racial violence that the Sinhala politicians have exploited to keep the Tamils under their heels. The tragic story of a cultured and educated Tamil people desiring to live in peace with the Sinhalese but requesting equality in education, employment and development of their land being massacred and violently thwarted by government thugs and the security services for over 60 years has now been told to a largely sceptical world. The Sinhala government propaganda machine has bought the support of British MPs with all expenses paid junkets to Sri Lanka to sing the praises of the tyrannical government with Tamil blood on its hands and to traduce the claims of the Tamils for self-government as international terrorism.

So it was that the world conspired by its silence at the mass genocide of the Tamils and looked askance when the elderly Tamils and their children were mown down by artillery shells, cluster bombs and chemical weapons. The leadership of the Tamil resistance was encouraged to surrender carrying white flags to the Sri Lankan army and was shot down in cold blood while doing so. The world last week remembered the 22,000 officers and elite of the Polish army and resistance that was massacred and buried in the forests of Katyn in Russia on the orders of Stalin. The Soviet Union for sixty years denied its culpability in this infamous massacre and blamed it on the retreating Nazi German army. But historians and military experts have persisted with their painstaking studies and finally Russia with Putin and Medvedev in charge have admitted Soviet responsibility. As you know, Polish President Lech Kaczynski died in an air crash a few weeks ago with other 96 of the Polish elite on their way to Katyn for a joint commemoration of the massacres.

What do we learn from the massacres of Katyn, Srebrenica and Rwanda that would be applicable to the over 100,000 Tamils killed in a racist and genocidal war in the Vanni. The UK Times provided satellite photographs of the evidence of trenches and mounds where more than 20,000 Tamils were killed and buried in the final days of the war last year.

Some even say that as much as 48,000 Tamils were killed by the Sinhala armed forces in the last three months of the war. Reliable eye witness accounts have reported that weak, infirm and injured Tamil people were buried half alive in trenches and shot by the Sri Lanka army. There was deliberate and mass starvation and destruction of the few hospitals left standing to cater to the people. The souls of these thousands of innocent Tamil victims seek justice and closure and we, the survivors, have to keep their avenging cries in the forefront of our moral crusade and political to bring the war criminals to justice.

The Tamil Diaspora is now well established in its different host countries including the UK with first, second and third generation Tamils, who have gained University and Professional education and are embarking on their careers. The voiceless Tamils in Eelam look to their kith and kin in the Diaspora to muster their political and economic strengths collectively on behalf of the Tamils in the homeland and to provide them with a voice in the international arena. We need to present ourselves as the democratic forum where we will be united in our commitment to obtain justice, equality, education, advancement and a bright future for our brothers and sisters both in the homeland and for the less fortunate amongst us in the UK. This then is the reason why we consider ourselves legitimately, politically and morally as the extended arm of the homeland Tamils. We are the voice of the voiceless and our two hearts beat together in unison; one consanguineous Tamil global brotherhood (and sisterhood) separated by the ocean that the Sri Lankan government forced us to travel and yet bound together in language and culture, heart and mind, faith and hope that one day we shall have a Tamil Eelam, a historic land of the people for which we have shed much sweat, blood and tears and shall have reached the promised land. We offer the pledge that we wish the Sinhalese well in their own land and we can work together to make both our lands flow with milk and honey.

I now come to the first part of the title of my lecture.

A strategic review of the democratic political options for the Global Tamil Diaspora

In the general elections of last week, despite all the threats and corruption of the government, only about 25% of the Tamil people voted. This is a severe indictment of the government that claims that the Tamil people are happy with the situation created by the government. Yes, the people have long endured a war declared on them by the government for wanting their freedom and democracy.

They would now like to have normalcy restored where they can pursue their lives with their relatives and friends in a secure society with security and with the basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, shelter, medicines, education and employment. Once these basic needs are met, then the Tamils will want the higher needs which have to do with equality of opportunity in education and employment and aspirations to true freedom and human rights as is defined in the UN Charter.

I propose to review the strategic political options available to the Global Tamil Diaspora.

Obviously the UK Tamil Diaspora is a historically important part of the Diaspora. There may be more expatriate Tamils in Canada than in the UK, but the UK Tamils are generally looked upon as the longest and best established Tamil community in terms of the period of their settlement here.

What are the political options open to the UK Tamil Diaspora:

1. Carry on with the military war against the Sri Lankan government as if nothing really changed in the last year.
2. Engage in charitable and social work to alleviate the situation for the Tamils in the homeland
3. Harness the democratic power of the Tamil Diaspora in the different countries with a view to promoting functioning democratic institutions to represent the expatriate Tamils in the

international community and to express solidarity and support for the Tamils in Eelam. These institutions will be based on democratically approved constitutions for elections of representatives and for administration and decision making.

Let us take the first option above, of continuing with the war.

In my opinion, this option has been given 25 years of unimpeded support but unfortunately in the world of post - 9/11 our freedom movement was given the nasty appellation of ‘international terrorism’ by the Sri Lankan government and by most of the world. Although our resistance tried to have this description removed, its fate and ours were sealed by the self-interests of China, India, US , Russia and EU. It is self-evident that we could not have taken on the whole world. It is only after this so-called threat of international terrorism as portrayed by Sri Lanka was removed through a racial bloodbath that the UN and the world seems to open its eyes and be prepared to enquire into the massacres and genocide that took place in the Vanni. There is no military force of any substance left to fight for the Tamils and our people need a respite after so many hard years of war and attendant misery. The strength of the Tamils is in the growing strength of the Diaspora. And we must make it count. In history, it was the Jewish Diaspora that kept the fires of Zion burning in their hearts for centuries. Tamil Eelam should not take that long if it is approached in unity and strength and our cries for liberation are carried forward by the Tamil youth invested with intimate knowledge of history and a determination to release our people from bondage.

The second option to do charitable and social work is but a small part of the larger 3rd Option to harness the democratic power of the Tamil Diaspora. The Western world steeped in its democratic ideals will resonate favourably to the Tamil Diaspora adopting the option to involve the Diaspora in a free and fair democratic constitution and elections. We cannot then be accused of autocratic and unrepresentative leadership or governance.

An eminent persons group has studied the situation and reported in January 2010 on the basic law and process of setting up the Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam. There is presently a plan to elect eligible representatives to the first Tamil Constituent Assembly on 2nd May 2010 in the UK. This will be empowered with other global representatives to draft an autochthonous (for native Tamils from Eelam) constitution. This body is presently known by its acronym of TGTE (Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam). The elected representatives will be the democratically elected voice of the Tamil Diaspora throughout the world and, it is hoped, will carry forward the hopes and aspirations of the Eelam Tamil people. We need to give it your commitment and support by way of voting and financing, and offering your considered views and thoughts for a vibrant Parliamentary democracy.

Although we will be taking small steps in the first instance in our pursuit of democratic options for the Global and UK Tamil Diaspora, it must be seen to be open and fair in voter registration, candidate eligibility and administration and have as its main objective a separate and free state of Tamil Eelam in the merged North and East of Sri Lanka. It must also have other objectives like for any other Parliament for the different functions of government, including rehabilitation. The elected UK Tamil National political entity (TGTE) could, if required, live in a healthy democratic

pluralistic environment with the presence of the GTF, BTF, TWG and similar bodies in the UK Tamil landscape, provided these elements foreswear to comply with the overall fundamental objectives of the Apex body and are prepared to work within the democratic framework of decision-making authority and responsibility, as happens with the parliaments of democratic countries.

The elected representatives should also commit themselves to collecting evidence and presenting facts to the UN and the International Criminal Court for the indictment of senior military and civil leaders involved in genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. The report of the People's Tribunal on Sri Lanka - An international panel of eminent international Jurists co-hosted by Trinity College, Dublin, and called the 'Dublin' report will be a good starting point for this enquiry.

Freedom with equality and justice for the Tamils in Eelam is my call, and my refrain is a land of freedom and opportunity for the Tamils where we can in a parody of the 'Star spangled banner' sing " 'Tis the brave Eelam banner! Oh! long may it wave □o'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!"

I thank you for listening to me patiently and I wish to remind you that what I have proposed today will be a living monument to the life and work of CJT Thamotheram.