

14th January 2009



TAMIL WRITERS GUILD

Bill Rammell, MP
The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Foreign & Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

Dear Minister,

Lies, Damn Lies and Ministerial Protestations

I am writing on behalf of the Tamil Writers Guild to state that it is with great sadness we read your reply at the Adjournment Debate held on 18th December 2008. In spite of all the information available to you, not least that provided by your fellow parliamentarians, you presented a picture of the Government of Sri Lanka's (GOSL) current and increasingly genocidal onslaught of the Tamil people (especially in northern Sri Lanka) in a way that was at best, another lost opportunity for the UK government to take a lead in denouncing those barbaric actions and at worst, a recipe for the Sri Lankan government to continue with those same inhumane practices.

I'd illustrate this with reference to the following examples from your speech:

No:	Your account	An Alternative Account
1	LTTE is a ruthless terrorist organisation	At a time when major international politicians like Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton have differentiated between terrorists and national liberation/freedom fighters (and citing the Tamil Tigers specifically in the latter category), it really is disgraceful you cannot make a similar assessment. This is even more difficult to understand given the numerous global examples of 'terrorism' which have been subsequently deemed to have been political struggles for independence, with the USA, Israel, South Africa, Northern Ireland and Kosovo to name just a few of those instances.
2	LTTE has no democratic mandate to represent the Tamil population... We must never allow a proscribed organisation to be the only voice of the people	Either you or your officials have not researched this conflict sufficiently or you have readily fallen for the GOSL's obfuscations. In 1976, all Tamil parties joined together and passed a resolution asking their Parliamentarians to seek the formation of a separate Tamil state in the homelands of the earlier Tamil Kingdoms. This was the Tamil people's mandate to their representatives. At the subsequent elections in 1977 and ever since, this mandate has been unchanged. The Thimpu Declaration adopted in Bhutan in 1985 by all Tamil groups specified the following 3 principles: a) Recognize Tamils as a nation. b) Recognize the concept of a Tamil homeland and c) Recognize the right to self-determination of the Tamils. These principles have been overwhelmingly



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		<p>supported by Tamils and most recently in the 2004 general election, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), a grouping together of the majority of Tamil political parties, won overwhelmingly in 22 electorates in the north-east (TNA won 22 out of the 25 north-east seats). Their manifesto stated that the TNA accepts the 'LTTE's leadership as the national leadership of the Tamil Eelam Tamils and the Liberation Tigers as the sole and authentic representatives of the Tamil people'.</p> <p>Thus, the legitimacy of the LTTE lies in the Tamils' right to self-determination under international law and the long and continued support and recognition of the LTTE by the overwhelming majority of Tamils, both within and outside that wretched island.</p>
3	<p>(LTTE) responsible for serious human rights abuses against civilians throughout Sri Lanka</p> <p>(LTTE) reported to recruit civilians, including children, into its ranks forcibly, to extort food and money from an already impoverished people, to abduct and kill Tamil civilians who disagree with its views or methods and to break all norms of international humanitarian law by preventing civilians from leaving conflict areas, effectively holding them as a human shield</p>	<p>Atrocities by the GOSL are plentiful. It has dropped over 14 million kilogrammes of explosive (more than the power of the Hiroshima bomb) on Tamil areas, including Russian made OFAB-500 cluster bombs used against displaced persons camps. Last September, evidenced its use of FAEs (Fuel Air Explosives) containing Ethylene Oxide, which consumes oxygen in the atmosphere around the point of impact and sucks the gas out of the lungs of people within range and suffocating them sometimes to death. The US forces in Vietnam had been severely condemned for using the weapon, which is banned under the UN Convention on Genocide. Its use in the more recent onslaught against the Tamil homelands is the clearest demonstration of the Sinhalese regime's genocidal intent.</p> <p>Your account also fails to take account of the GOSL and its related paramilitaries in brutalising and terrorising Tamils across the island and particularly, in the Tamil homelands. The incarceration of the Jaffna Tamils in what has been described as an open prison and the following quote from Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch provides yet another authoritative and damning account: "The Sri Lankan government says that the 'liberated' East is an example of democracy in action and a model for areas recaptured from the LTTE, but killings and abductions are rife, and there is total impunity for horrific abuses."</p>
4	<p>LTTE has conducted a terrorist campaign across the whole of Sri Lanka for nearly three decades,</p>	<p>The Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) of 1979 gives unlimited powers to the Sri Lankan security forces to arrest, detain, torture, rape, kill and dispose of the bodies of Tamils with impunity. Introduced with the specific aim of subverting the rule of law in the north-east and made permanent in 1982, the PTA provides for detention for up to 18 months with</p>



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	deliberately targeting thousands of individual civilians, as well as assassinating Government figures	neither trial nor access to lawyers or relatives. It allows confessions under torture as admissible evidence in court. On 12 th January 2009, Peter Foster in his regular Telegraph column wrote: "Lasantha Wickrematunge, 50, was stabbed and shot to death in broad daylight last Friday as he drove to work at The Sunday Leader, the liberal Colombo-based newspaper he edited. His death - conveniently obscured in the news agenda abroad by events in Gaza and at home by Sri Lankan army's gains against the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) in the Elephant Pass - sounds the death knell for civil society in Sri Lanka. Just like all the other state-sanctioned killings in Sri Lanka, the promised investigation will be an unholy sham. His killers won't be caught and 'we'll never know', who did it. However Mr Wickrematunge, writing from the grave, is in no doubt who was behind his murder: the Rajapakse regime and its lawless proxies."
5	There have also been allegations of genocide or the indiscriminate bombing of civilians in the Vanni by the Sri Lankan Government	Of the 80,000 civilian deaths thus far, it is widely acknowledged that 95 % have been Tamils killed by the armed forces or their paramilitary proxies. Anyone interested in the figures of the latest casualties, human rights violations, rapes, forced disappearances, abductions, killings, etc. of the Tamil community can get the information provided by the Tamil Centre for Human Rights of Paris to the sixth UN Human Rights Commission meetings in Geneva.
6	Government of Sri Lanka have primary responsibility for ensuring the human rights of its citizens	For over two decades, the Sri Lankan government has imposed an economic embargo on the Tamil areas by blocking access to food and medicine. Such an action is listed as an element of the crime of extermination under the Statute and Elements of the International Criminal Court. Successive governments of Sri Lanka have continued to commit violations of international humanitarian law, war crimes and crimes against humanity (Humanitarian Law Project 2006).
7	It is understandable that the Tamil community in this country are concerned about the plight of Tamils in Sri Lanka	The GOSL has been resisting for more than three years the calls by the UN, EU, AI, HRW, ICG, ICJ for UN human rights field monitoring: Philip Alston, UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Executions, has been urging for human rights monitoring of Sri Lanka from the time of his fact-finding mission to Sri Lanka in 2005. Equivalent calls by the UK All Party Parliamentary Group have been equally ignored by your government.
8until it (LTTE) renounces terrorist activities in word and deed, there is little	The international community needs to recognize the LTTE as a partner for peace, and as an equal party to the talks, otherwise there will be no progress and the failures of past, abrogated agreements will be repeated.



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	prospect of the proscription being lifted	With the current political climate framed by the war against terrorism, maybe it is timely for the international community to review its assessment of the LTTE as a terrorist group, as it would seem clear that it is resorting to the right to self-defence while struggling for the right to self-determination. The international community needs to take a balanced account of the conflict. It also needs to give diplomatic support to the LTTE to negotiate with the Sri Lanka government. If the international community wants peace in the area it must encourage this process.
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So, Minister, please do not be fooled by the GOSL's recent claims of having dealt a terminal blow to the Tamils' 30 year plus quest for their own homeland of Tamil Eelam. It would be very short-sighted to view the GOSL's [capture of Kilinochchi](#) and the Elephant Pass as a major defeat for the Tigers; the truth is it is only a symbolic defeat, and certainly of immense propaganda value to the government. The real significance of these developments may convince the Tigers it's time to forget their mini-state and resume guerrilla war.

If this ends up as the GOSL's long-term military occupation of the Tamil homelands, surrounded by a sophisticated guerrilla force nurtured by the Tamil community, the implications would be ominous. The GOSL is keen to keep the delusion intact, particularly at a time when their army is bogged down in the Tamil-dominated war zone. The potentially catastrophic consequences for the GOSL are only too clear, even though they prefer to disregard the lessons of the massive military reverses they suffered just ten years previously.

What is needed now is for a major and concerted international political intervention, backed by an international peace keeping force. Your recent pronouncements have not assisted this process and your determined refusal, in spite of repeated entreaties by your fellow parliamentarians, to condemn the GOSL's use of cluster bombs against the innocent Tamil civilians is not a harbinger of good sense or impartiality.

Perhaps I could leave you with one final thought, as reported in yesterday's Guardian article by Jonathan Steele in which he quoted the following extract from Lasantha Wickrematunge's speech 'from beyond the grave': "A military occupation of the country's north and east will require the Tamil people to live eternally as second class citizens, deprived of all self respect. Do not imagine that you can placate them by showering 'development' and 'reconstruction' on them in the post-war era. The wounds of war will scar them forever, and you will have an even more bitter and hateful diaspora to contend with."

It's your call Minister. We are ready to oblige.

Yours sincerely

Priya Thamotheram
Vice Chairman, Tamil Writers Guild, UK.