

Sri Lanka – the only possible action

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As the entire civilized world, with the exception of 'patriotic' Sinhalese (which excludes the likes of myself), is aghast at the mass murder of Tamil civilians in Northern Sri Lanka, by the politico-military junta which calls itself the 'Sri Lankan Government', the options available to stop the slaughter of Tamils are limited.

No amount of protests, hunger strikes, self-immolations, human chains, endless letters, lobbying (deaf) politicians, calls for action by the impotent United Nations, the equally impotent Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) endorsed by the UN World Summit in 2005, will do anything to stop the genocide of the Tamil civilians, or their incarceration in concentration camps.

This is not an attempt to underestimate the importance of the unprecedented massive rallies that have occurred all over the world, especially in Britain and Canada (which, indeed, should be escalated and expanded).

It is not an attempt to belittle the enormous contribution made by groups such as the British Tamil Forum, the finest group in North America, the Canadian Tamil Congress, Tamils Against Genocide, Canadian-Voice-for-Eelam-Tamils, and Tamil Info (whose daily emails flood my computer), the extraordinary dedication of those who keep Tamilnet going, Eelamation, the outstanding websites such as Tamilcanadian, Sangam, Nadesan Satyenda's Tamilnation the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation and those on the ground in the North who risk life and limb to send photo-evidence of what the suffering of the Tamil people, the Jaffna 'situation Report', the Tamil Centre for Human Rights, Tamil Writer's Guild, , and the dedicated work of scores of individual Tamil activists and concerned people who spend many hours, day after day, trying to publicise what is happening to the Tamil people. Any omissions are unintentional, there are so many others who enable me to function. These contributions are invaluable and must be acknowledged and applauded, but we now have to take the next step – imposing serious economic sanctions, which is what this paper is all about.

The Players and their games

The UN, the international tea-club of nations good and evil, are playing their usual game of 'big talk but no effective action'

The UN Secretary General, Ban-Ki-Moon, has expressed "*deep concern*" at the situation, which is a predictable result of their cowardly act, leaving the conflict zone on 9 September 2008, when asked to do so by the murderous Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL), so that there would be no international witnesses to the Genocide of the Tamil people.

He now says, (23 April 2009, Brussels) that he is dispatching a humanitarian team to monitor the situation because "*so many lives have been sacrificed. There is to time to lose*". Did he have to wait six months to realize this?

To quote the UN figures (almost certainly a gross under-estimate of the actual figures), the UN spokesman in Colombo, Gordon Weiss, said that in the 3 months since 20 January 2009, 6,432 civilians had been killed and 13,048 wounded. He added that the fighting was now expected to intensify, and with it, the inevitable civilian casualties

Gotabaya Rajapakse, Sri Lanka's Defense Secretary and the President's brother, who is personally supervising the Genocide, predictably rejected the proposed UN action. He told the

BBC, *"It's not a sensible thing at the moment. Here is a civilian rescue operation going on in the area and allowing aid agencies inside the conflict zone is not matching with ground realities"*.

This assessment of the "ground realities", comes from an ex-Sri Lankan soldier, who went in search of greener pastures to the US, became an American citizen, and was running a "7-11" Convenient store in Los Angeles. He returned to Sri Lanka because his brother was elected President. To put what he said more accurately, the "ground reality" is that the genocide, from bombing, shelling, starvation, and the denial of medical help, and the incarceration of the Tamils in concentration camps, have not yet been completed. So it is not a 'sensible thing' for aid agencies to go in and sabotage the intention of the Sri Lankan government.

Predictably, the UN will ask the military arm of the Tamil people to lay down their arms, but will do nothing about the military arm of the Sinhalese people, the so-called "Sri Lankan Security Forces", the greatest source of Insecurity for the Tamil people in the North and East, to say nothing of the insecurity of Tamils in the Sinhalese South.

It will ignore the stark fact that International NGOs, including those affiliated to the UN, have been expelled from the Tamil areas by the GoSL, so that Genocide can be done without witnesses or hindrance.

Will a UN Peace-Keeping, or even Human Rights Monitoring Force, be introduced, in the setting of an outrageous massacre of Tamil civilians on a mind-boggling scale? No, it will not be. Such action is not on the agenda of the UN. That is the reality of UN 'action'. Any other course of action would have been exceptional, and to expect exceptional events to occur is just wishful thinking.

As for the UN Secretary General's "deep concern", it is a nonsensical comment. Who is *not* concerned? The only ones I know of are some blood-thirsty Sinhalese celebrating in the Sri Lankan South, led by those hoodlums in yellow-robos and not-so-clean shaven heads, supposed followers of one of the greatest teachers of peace the world has ever known, Gautama Buddha, and the political opportunists in the 'Marxist' JVP, that has long since abandoned Marxism for the far more politically rewarding Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-religious chauvinism. Indeed, the leader of the latter, who fled to the UK to avoid prosecution on a murder charge, and later returned to lead his notorious Party, said that Marx had got it all wrong! They still wear a red cap with the hammer and a sickle, but their "Marxism" stops there.

What about Navaneetham Pillai, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights? She has stated that the casualties may reach "catastrophic levels" if the fighting is not stopped. But 'catastrophe' i.e. the genocide of the Tamil people in the North (and East), is precisely what the Sinhalese regime is determined to achieve.

Will protests by any other politician or eminent person in any part of the world, make the slightest difference to the genocidal intent of the Sinhalese regime in Colombo? No it will not.

Will India intervene? India might intervene to **help** the GoSL (there is some evidence that this is already occurring, and that the Indian casualties are being flown to Tamilnadu), but there will be no intervention to save the Tamils from Genocide, however strong the protests are in Tamilnadu. As so often happens, these protests will subside after the current Indian elections, whatever the outcome. One of Rajapakse's cronies got it right when he described the politicians in Tamilnadu as 'political jokers'.

As for Tamil Americans eg 'Tamils for Obama' who expect the new regime to intervene, they are not in the world of reality. The brief comment of concern from the Obama administration is appreciated, but will not stop the Genocide of Tamils. More than an expression of concern is needed. Will Hillary Clinton fly to Colombo with a non-Sri Lankan who can understand Tamil (so

that Rajapakse does not need to provide an 'interpreter' whose interpretation might be very different from what is told), and demand that she and her staff be allowed to see the 'concentration camps' and speak with those who have been 'liberated'? Will she tell Rajapakse that unless she is allowed to do so, all US aid to Sri Lanka will stop? Not a hope.

A more likely scenario is for the US to contact Delhi and negotiate a deal with the Indian leadership for a share of Trincomalee harbour, the 4th largest natural harbour in the world, so that the American troops in distant Diego Garcia can be brought to a location from where the control of the economically crucial Indian Ocean is possible. This is 'reality politics' – geo-politics played out in the real world.

With massacres of Tamil civilians on an unprecedented scale, here is what Hillary Clinton told lawmakers in Washington on 22 April 2009, *"I think that the Sri Lankan government knows that the entire world is very disappointed that in its efforts to end what it sees as 25 years of conflict, it is causing such untold suffering."* Is being "very disappointed" an adequate response to Genocide / Crimes against Humanity? To put this into its proper context, this was said 48 hours after the worst massacre of Tamil civilians in a single day (see below).

Robert Templer of the International Crisis Group seems to have fallen into the same trap as the Tamil Americans. He says, *"Barack Obama's administration has said it is committed to the principles of international law and humanitarian protection. Sri Lanka is the perfect opportunity for the new U.S. President to show that this is not empty rhetoric"*. He, like the Tamil Americans, is about to realize that it *is* empty rhetoric. It always is, when human rights are pitted against commercial gains and geo-politics. That is politics in practice.

As for the American 'Model Indictment' to charge Defense Secretary, Gotabaya Rajapakse and Army Commander Sarath Fonseka (both 'green card' holders in the US), in the US Courts, it is just a pathetic (and costly) exercise, which will appeal only to desperate people clutching at straws. It is time that this futile exercise was buried with a monument which reads, "Rest in Peace" (or costly pieces).

For sure, these criminals, including Mahinda Rajapakse, who is the Executive President, Minister of Defense and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, will have to be charged. But this is for a professional in this field such as the British barrister Geoffrey Robertson QC, the author of *Crimes against Humanity*, who has the necessary runs on the board. The expatriate Tamils, despite all their education and intellect, are, for some bizarre reason, simply unable to see this. God knows I have tried to make them see reason but, as the saying goes, *"There are none as blind as those who will not see"*.

Amnesty International (AI) and Human Rights Watch (HRW) will, undoubtedly, produce yet another Report when it is all over, and make the usual suggestions for 'good behaviour'. I have just (22 April 2009), had an email from the local AI representative in Brisbane. *"We are in touch with the IS (International Secretariat of AI, London) about the situation and asked yesterday for a position statement but they are not planning any work at this stage"*. What? AI has not planned "any work at this stage"? For the record, on 20 April 2009, more than 1,000 Tamil civilians were killed and 2,300 injured in one of the worst atrocities in a single day in the series of massacres of Tamil civilians that have occurred in the past 25 years. To claim that AI was not aware of this is simply unacceptable. One could legitimately ask, *"What more needs to be done before AI will 'plan any work'?"* The total annihilation of the Tamils?

When the belated Reports come out, the GoSL will simply toss them in the dustbin, as has been done for years. The parts in these Reports that condemn what the Tamil militants have done will be applauded; the parts critical of the Government will simply be denied or labeled as "Support for Terrorism".

Most Sri Lankan politicians and their cronies lie. What makes this serious, is not only that the lies are blatant, but that with the international media excluded and the local media heavily censored, the only information available to the outside world is from these globe-trotting inveterate liars. One of many examples was when the previous President Chandrika Kumaratunga was interviewed in November 2001 on the BBC *Hard Talk* by Tim Sebastian. She claimed that the US State Department's 2001 Report on human rights was a lie. Sebastian, "*Why would they lie?*" Kumaratunga, "*Well, there are all sorts of people who want to lie*". She then went on to make the hilarious claim that only one Tamil girl had been raped in Jaffna. It would have been important to get the name of this unfortunate girl so that the hundreds of mothers of Tamil girls who have been raped, could be reassured that it was only a 'pretence-rape', and if they got pregnant, it was a 'pseudo-pregnancy'.

The other characteristic of Sri Lankan politicians and their cronies is their abysmal ignorance. Here is an example, again from the previous President Chandrika Kumaratunga. She was interviewed by Zain Verjee of CNN in November 2001.. Verjee, cited the Human Rights Watch Report of 2001 which criticized her government for the way it treated Tamil civilians in the north and the east (discrimination, restriction of freedom of movement, arbitrary arrests, abuse at the hands of government, army and police, and imposing forced labour). Kumaratunga, "*Lot of it lies. What is that report? By whom is it written?*" Verjee, "*It was written by Human Rights Watch. It's the 2001 Country Report for Sri Lanka*". The gaffe-prone President Kumaratunga, "*The Human Rights Watch, what is that?*"

Examples from the current regime are too numerous to count, and is now farcical. Gotabaya Rajapakse in a media interview said that hospitals are a 'legitimate target' to be bombed. This 'ex-7-11 manager' has no idea that this violates Article 1 and 4 of the Geneva Convention, signed and ratified by the GoSL which specifically states that in no circumstance could civilian medical facilities be attacked.

This will continue when the AI and HRW reports come out, by the even more gaffe-prone Gotabaya Rajapakse, the supposed Defense Minister, but in reality, the one actually running the country and who has even more to hide and/or deny. Any adverse comments in the AI and HRW reports will be flatly denied, or claimed to be 'supporting Tamil 'terrorism'.

As for the expatriate Tamils, some 1.3 million, they are suffering from, what can best be described as "unrealistic expectations", or hallucinations. This is a 'disorder' they have suffered from for years, much to the frustration of those of us, non-Tamils, who have supported the entirely justifiable struggle of the Tamil people to live with equality, dignity and safety in the area of historical habitation of the Tamil people, the North and East.

The world can shout itself hoarse – the arrogance of the Sri Lankan regime is such that in their view, "*The world can go to hell*".

Attempts to get foreigners 'negotiators', however distinguished, into Sri Lanka, will simply not succeed – as Gordon Brown, the British Prime Minister, realized a few weeks ago. They will not get past the airport.

Nor will foreign media. Jeremy Page, a reporter for the famous British newspaper, *The Times*, was escorted to the detention room on arrival at the Colombo airport a week ago, locked up for the night, and deported to the UK the next day. Sri Lanka was ranked 165th out of 173 countries in the Reporters Without Borders 2008 press freedom index.

Tossing Sri Lanka out of the UN Human Rights Council for its outrageous human rights record (21 May 2008) was also an exercise in futility. The Sri Lankan regime could not care less. These are futile gestures of no practical value, similar to acts taken against the likes of Zimbabwe's Mugabe. Dictators and tyrants are not swayed by public opinion or protests.

Taking on tyrants

It has taken the Tamils, both in and outside Sri Lanka, a long time to realize a simple truth. To put this crudely, *"It is not possible to bring down Kfir jets with bows and arrows"*. I was sent a heart-rending video from the Tamil North which moved me deeply. A Kfir jet had dropped a bomb on a hut, killing the mother. The daughter, about 10 years, rescued a piece of her mother's saree, all that was left of her. Her 5 years old brother was by her side. The Kfir jet returned for a second round of bombing. The girl protected the only part of her mother, the piece of cloth, while the boy, with anger written all over his face, picked up a stone which he threw at the on-coming jet to bring it down. It was one of the most moving scenes I have seen, and illustrates in a dramatic way, the problem.

Once the GoSL got into using Kfir bombers, helicopter gunships, and multibarrel rocket launchers, for the Tamils to take on the fight militarily was quite impossible. With Armed Forces, armed to the hilt by China, America, India, Pakistan, and Israel, to name just a few, all that was necessary was someone with the mentality of Hitler, and his 'Final Solution' to appear. Such a person appeared in the form of Mahinda Rajapakse, elected President in November 2005, and enhanced by his ex-Army brother, Gotabaya, and the Army Commander, General Sarath Fonseka (who has openly stated that Sri Lanka is a Sinhala-Buddhist country and had the necessary weapons to deliver on this ethno-religious chauvinism). This lethal combination was not prepared to set any limits on civilian deaths or suffering, and was prepared, indeed more than prepared, to commit Genocide of the Tamils – the 'Final Solution'. The results are there for all to see.

This politico-military monster had a soft underbelly, vulnerable to attack. That was the economy. The Tamil response, especially of the expatriates, should have been to go for the soft underbelly, instead of putting all their eggs in the military basket, the GoSL component of which was internationally-backed, sponsored and equipped militarily. The Tamils could never match that, whatever their commitment. This fundamental truth has to be appreciated even at this late stage.

We cannot get rid of the Kfir bombers, but we can make it impossible for the GoSL to buy the fuel to fly them, or the shells to enable the multi-barrel rocket launchers to continue the human carnage.

Action

In a sentence, it is a boycott and isolation of this dreadful regime,

The most urgent immediate action is one that can only be taken by Trade Unions across the world. Trade Unions, or rather, the workers who give the Trade Unions the power they have, will have to be apprised of the injustices suffered by the Tamil people over some 60 years, and extent of the violation of their human rights, now with unarguable features of genocide. That done, the Trade Unions should be asked to refuse to handle any goods and services in or out of Sri Lanka. Tea, rubber, garments, spices coming out of Sri Lanka and anything going into the country, be they goods or tourists, will have to be targeted at once. Any delay will see another Rwanda.

This is the single most important and urgent action needed, one which can be done and which cannot be blocked by the Sri Lankan regime. Tamil civilians in the North have been encircled by the Sri Lankan Government, which, in turn, can be encircled by us in the international community if we get our act together..

In addition to this critical Trade Union action, a well-organised boycott of Sri Lankan goods and services (and service providers) is very important, although it might not have the immediate effects that Trade Union action will have. This will need some work to determine who provides what service eg telecommunication services, and who imports what. It must include Travel agents and tour operators, and those who import spices and goods from that country. I am aware that Palestinians and others who oppose what Israel is doing in Gaza, have extensive lists targeting Israel. This must be done with the Asian-equivalent of Gaza – Sri Lanka, and the lists circulated widely if the campaign is to have any effect.

All other avenues of isolating this barbaric regime can be taken up simultaneously or at a later stage. These must include an expulsion of Sri Lanka from the British Commonwealth (which will end the cricket), and also seriously affect the ability of the regime to raise funds from Commonwealth countries, or export goods at concessional tariffs to these countries.

On the macro-economic front, the IMF is the only institution that can supply Sri Lanka with the funds urgently needed to stave off bankruptcy and wholesale economic collapse. Having turfed out the IMF two years ago, the Government has now had to go cap in hand for a \$1.9 billion bail-out package. This is now being considered and must be blocked, although the IMF usually does what it wants to prop up some of the most corrupt and barbaric regimes in the world.

No IMF package comes without strings and these usually involve a cut in social services, an increase in taxation (the current inflation rate, 28%, the highest in Asia), and a cut in government spending. Sri Lanka is in no position to bargain since several loan and line of credit payments fall due this year with almost \$1 billion of debt repayments due in 2009.

The economic crisis, as serious as the humanitarian crisis, makes it imperative to strike where it hurts, ie the economy, if this barbaric and irresponsible regime is to be brought to its senses. This must involve the blocking of exports, imports and services to this highly export/import dependent country.

International support

On April 10-13, 2009, I was invited to address the International Socialist Convention in Sydney, Australia, and present the problems facing the Tamil people and what can be done.

There were some 200 delegates, none of whom were Sri Lankans. They came from several South American countries, South Africa, India, (the delegate from Pakistan had his visa blocked), Indonesia, Palestine, Malaysia, Zimbabwe, Haiti, Cuba, Sudan, the Philippines, West Papua, Timor Leste, Vietnam, New Zealand and, of course, a large number from Australia.

When I showed them what was going on behind the closed and censored doors of the so-called “Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka”, they were horrified. The support for the Tamil struggle and the condemnation of the Sri Lankan government was extensive. There was not a single dissenting voice.

When I suggested a boycott of goods and services, and an isolation of the regime, as the only answer, there were no dissenting voices among the 200 delegates from all parts of the globe. They cannot all be wrong. Many of them had dealt with the likes of Rajapakse and know what works and what does not.

On the last day of the Conference, the youths (all non-Sri Lankans), took over. Their support for the Tamil struggle was even greater. After the meeting, as a gesture of solidarity, a unanimous decision was made to go outside the Australian Prime Minister’s Sydney residence, where three Tamil boys were fasting, protesting at what was going on in Sri Lanka.

Protests in Sri Lanka are possible but not without risk, with a murderous gang running the country, backed by Sinhalese thugs, hooligans, and the overwhelmingly Sinhalese Police and Armed Forces, Dissent equates with treason, the penalty being assassination. As such, it is difficult for progressive Sinhalese in the Sinhalese South such as Dr. Vickremabahu Karunaratne or Siritunga Jayasuriya, to do much by way of mass protests. The murderous regime could well turn the guns on protesting Sinhalese, even if they can be marshalled.

It is only, and I again stress only, those outside Sri Lanka who can act. I am not trying to reinvent the wheel. I am only setting out what worked in a much less vulnerable country – apartheid South Africa – which brought that regime to its knees. If South Africa, rolling in gold and diamonds, with a growth rate at the time only second to Japan, could have been brought to its knees, to bring an already near- bankrupt Sinhalese regime in Colombo to its senses should be relatively easy.

With such extensive and wide ranging support, I simply cannot see that it is impossible to get the support of the Trade Unions in these counties (and many others), if the reality of what is going on is presented to them.

As for the canard, “*sanctions will affect the civilian population*”, we have been down that road before (in Apartheid South Africa). For sure, they will, but far less than would genocide.

The problem is that the expatriate Tamil community has simply not focused on this most powerful ‘weapon’. The problem is their *thinking* which will have to change, and with it, the actions taken.

The most critical and urgent need of the hour is to counter the disinformation campaign which, to date, the Sri Lankan Government has won by throwing millions of dollars into a professionally planned and well executed campaign which the Tamils have not been able to deal with.

It is to counter this disinformation campaign that I have recorded and distributed a dozen dvds to show the world what the Sri Lankan regime is struggling to hide, by excluding international observers and media from the Tamil areas. There was a huge demand for the dvds and absolute shock and horror at what they saw when some of the dvds were shown.

I have not the slightest doubt that there is a huge untapped ‘resource’ here to fight the brutal and murderous regime in Colombo. It is a highly receptive group and one that will act if the atrocities and injustices being done in Sri Lanka are brought to their attention.

Action has to be immediate and worldwide. I urge you to go down this road since it is the only one that will save the Tamils from Genocide or life in concentration camps.

24 April 2009