



**Annual Report from Elliot Colburn MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Tamils**

As we have ushered in the New Year and celebrated Pongal, I want to update you on the work of the APPG over the past year and look towards 2022.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of the community groups, academics, NGOs, campaigners, and everyone who has worked with the APPG in 2021. We cannot operate without your support and I hope this relationship will continue to strengthen.

Wishing you all the best for 2022!

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Elliot Colburn', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Elliot Colburn**

Member of Parliament for Carshalton and Wallington  
Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Tamils

**APPG activity in numbers**

Members of Parliament of the APPG met on multiple occasions in 2021. This included:

- Two meetings with Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, the Minister for South Asia, the United Nations and the Commonwealth at the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.
- Six briefings and evidence-gathering sessions with multiple academics, community groups and non-government organisations, including: Dr Thusiyan Nandakumar (Editor-in-Chief of Tamil Guardian), Dr Madurika Rasaratnam (City University of London), Crisis Group, Freedom from Torture, Human Rights Watch, Pearl, Tamil Information Centre, and many more!
- Various meetings amongst Members to discuss workplans on topics, including: UNHRC resolution and funding, Tamil Guardian censorship, sanctions, police and military training, Parliamentary actions, and more.

In Parliament, the APPG also held a backbench business debate in the main chamber of the House of Commons to discuss the United Nations Human Rights Council resolution, wrote to the FCDO and other Government departments multiple times, and submitted over 50 Parliamentary Questions related to Tamils and human rights in Sri Lanka.

Outside Parliament, many MPs of the APPG attended and spoke at external events, such as the Tamil Remembrance Day event in the ExCel Centre in November.

## **UNHRC**

Arguably the most important work that the APPG focussed on in 2021 was campaigning for the adoption of a new human rights resolution at the 46<sup>th</sup> session of the UNHRC in the spring.

In February 2020, the Sri Lankan government withdrew from the previous UNHRC resolution, which the previous government had co-sponsored, to promote reconciliation, accountability and human rights in the country. Since then, the human rights situation in Sri Lanka has deteriorated.

In March last year, the APPG held a debate in the House of Commons Chamber to ensure the UK Government continues to uphold its commitment to champion human rights in Sri Lanka and support the new resolution. The debate can be viewed [here](#). The APPG also spoke with Minister Ahmad ahead of the 46<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNHRC and wrote to the FCDO on several occasions.

Thanks to the hard work of multiple organisations across the globe, a new human rights resolution was adopted which should allow the UN to collect, consolidate, analyse and preserve information and evidence, and to develop possible strategies for future accountability processes for gross violations of human rights. Since the adoption of the resolution, the APPG has met with Minister Ahmad and written to the FCDO to ensure funding for the mechanism is properly secured.

Going forward in 2022, we will continue putting pressure on the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to give the mechanism a real bite so it can actually address the deteriorating human rights situation in Sri Lanka.

## **Covid-19**

For a second year running, the world has faced the immense challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic. The APPG acknowledges the incredible contributions and sacrifices of Tamils in the UK to tackle the pandemic, in the NHS, care sector, pharmacies, vaccine programmes, and much more.

## **International sanctions**

In the Summer, the APPG met with Dr Madurika Rasaratnam from City University of London. Dr Rasaratnam briefed the group on the impacts of international sanctions and how they can be used to help put pressure on nations committing human rights abuses. Following the meeting, Members of the APPG submitted Parliamentary Questions and wrote to the FCDO to call for sanctions to be introduced on those who are credibly accused of war crimes in Sri Lanka.

Recently, Theresa Villiers (MP for Chipping Barnet) and I renewed these calls for Magnitsky-style sanctions on Shavendra Silva, which can be viewed [here](#). The US government has sanctioned him; it's time the UK Government do the same. The APPG will continue working on this issue in 2022.

## **Police training and militarisation**

In September, the APPG was disturbed to see distressing video footage of Sri Lankan police assaulting and arresting a member of parliament for the Tamil National People's Front, Kajendren Selvarajah, in Jaffna. We strongly condemn the arrest and are deeply concerned by yet another incident of Sri Lankan police brutality. We understand that due procedure was not

followed relating to Mr Selvarajah's arrest, with no arrest warrant in place nor any charges being produced. We further understand that the lawmaker was taking part in a memorial event for a Tamil hunger striker, who passed away 34 years ago.

We called on the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to raise this matter with her counterpart in Sri Lanka and demand all due procedures are followed by Sri Lankan authorities with regards to Mr Selvarajah's detention.

The APPG welcomed news in November that Police Scotland would end its training of police in Sri Lanka, following the deteriorating human rights situation. Colleagues raised this issue in the House of Commons, as well as directly with the FCDO and Home Office.

As Sri Lanka's domestic militarisation escalates, so too does the abuse of Tamils and other minority groups. We welcome the move to end police training in Sri Lanka. It sends a strong message to the government there that human rights abuses are unacceptable and the international community will not support the use of military or police to intimidate innocent people.

### **Tamil Guardian Instagram suspension**

In October, the APPG was concerned to hear of the suspension of the Tamil Guardian Instagram page. As the only major English language website to report on Tamil affairs, their service provides crucial coverage to the Tamil diaspora in the UK, Sri Lanka and across the globe.

We felt that the disabling of Tamil Guardian's Instagram page was completely unjustified and immediately wrote to Facebook to raise our concerns. Following this, the group invited the Editor-in-Chief of Tamil Guardian, Dr Thusiyan Nandakumar, to brief the group on the situation. We will continue to investigate this issue.

### **Looking ahead at 2022**

It is said that with the advent of the month of Thai (January) comes new opportunities. In this new year, the APPGT will take advantage of the new opportunity to continue fighting for truth, justice and accountability for Tamils in Sri Lanka and across the world. We will work with the Governments, NGOs and community groups to ensure that the UNHRC resolution from last year is properly funded and carries enough weight to have an influence. Calls for the UK Government to implement sanctions on those who are credibly accused of war crimes in Sri Lanka will also be reaffirmed and fought for, as well as much, much more.

The APPGT would like to wish everyone a very happy and healthy New Year, and we look forward to working with you all in 2022!