

TAMIL CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS - TCHR/CTDH
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TAMIL RANKS 15TH LINGUISTIC GROUP IN THE WORLD!

"If our language, our programs, our creations are not strongly present in the new media, the young generation of our country will be economically and culturally marginalized".

Jacques Chirac, 22nd President of France (1995-2007)

Article one (1), paragraph one (1) of the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights, (6 June 1996) says, "This Declaration considers as a language community any human society established historically **in a particular territorial space, whether this space be recognized or not**, which identifies itself as a people and has developed a common language as a natural means of communication and cultural cohesion between its members. The term language specific to a territory refers to the language of the community historically established in such a space." Also there are many other International Declarations, Charter, Recommendations, etc advocating the linguistic rights of peoples.

The "Ethnologue" organisation says that in nearly two hundred countries, more than 6,800 languages are in use; that out of these languages only 2,261 have writing systems and that all other languages are only spoken.

Analysis of these languages on a regional basis, shows that: nearly 2,200 languages are spoken in Asia, around 2,000 in Africa, nearly 1,000 in the Americas, 1,300 in the Pacific region and 230 in Europe.

When we consider the living languages and look at the top twenty most spoken in the World, we see that the ***Tamil language ranks between fifteenth and seventh position.***

It is interesting to compare this linguistic group with those people whose language is linked to a specific country - such as Poland, Italy, Turkey, Greece, Indonesia, Korea, Thailand, Myanmar (Burma) and Iran. There are many other examples in Europe and Asia. The speakers of these languages, ***which rank far below Tamil, have a Country of their own!*** For information, it is even to be noted that many Tamil words are in use in the English language.

At the same time, the ***Sinhalese language ranks only at sixty-eighth position*** and it is only used in Sri Lanka. This fact should be considered seriously by the International Community, which pretends to be ignorant of this truth. We are reminded of the 'Chicken and Egg' story!

The Tamil Language which is spoken in Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa, Mauritius and a few other countries is the result of colonial emigration from South India of Tamils in the British Colonial period. During the same period, in 1862, Tamils were brought from South India to work in the tea plantations in the Up-country area in then Ceylon.

These Tamils are **not to be confused with Tamils who have lived in the Island for thousands of years**, long before the arrival of Buddhism and the birth of the Sinhalese language in the island. The actual historical evidence of the island's Tamil Kingdom, prior and during the colonial period can be found in Universities, Libraries and government Archive Centres in Portugal, Netherlands and the United Kingdom. ***Fortunately***, this evidence cannot be destroyed like the documents destroyed in the Jaffna public Library by the heinous Sri Lanka government-sponsored arson attack in 1981. This was done deliberately to completely destroy historical evidence of the Tamil Kingdom and the history of the Tamil people in the Island.

It is to be noted that the Tamils were taken to South Africa to work in the sugar cane industry at the same time as Tamils were brought to Ceylon to the tea plantations. But today none of the Tamils in South Africa work in the sugar cane industry. Even with the horrendous history of Apartheid, Tamils have prospered well in South Africa. Today they are in part Academics, Economists, Industrialists and many are in key positions in South African decision-making bodies. However, in the Up-country in Sri Lanka, Tamils are still in the tea plantations picking tea leaves as they have done, under extremely exploitative conditions, for generations. This shows that Ceylon or Sri Lanka's racism against Tamils is worse even than the evils of Apartheid in South Africa.

Under the Ceylon 1948 Citizenship Act and the laws of disenfranchisement, the Tamils of Indian origin (who are known as plantation Tamils or up-country Tamils) were deprived of selecting their representatives to Parliament. More than a million plantation Tamil workers were rendered stateless. The majority of them were repatriated back to India in 1964. These people had lived in the Island for over hundred and fifteen years and they were the backbone of Sri Lanka's economy – the tea, rubber and cocoa industries.

It is surprising that the people who speak one of the oldest languages in the World, which ranks in fifteenth position as most spoken language, do not even have any fundamental political rights in the Island of Sri Lanka. Why is this? The present feeble attempts of the International Community with regard to the Genocide being committed against the Tamils, exemplify and hint at what also happened in the past.

The current atrocities - the most vile slaughter of the Tamil people - follow six decades of ill-treatment, discrimination, torture and killings – conspicuously ignored by the international community - despite the fact that human rights defenders and others, have worked day and night for over two decades, documenting and exposing these massive violations.

As we said in our Press release of 16 April 2009, *“The continued use of Tamils as Pawns must be stopped and their inalienable rights should be respected”*. The International Community must help the Tamils to obtain their lost rights and their land. This is the only way Tamils can live in peace and harmony - even with their neighbours.

Article 1 of both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); the UN Charter; Universal Declaration of Human Rights and many other instruments provide strong legal basis and encouragement for the re-establishment of Tamil Kingdom in the island of Sri Lanka.

Furthermore the mandate given by the Tamil people in the 1977 and 2004 general elections stands witness to this case.

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