



TAMIL WRITERS GUILD

29th July 2007

Rt Hon. Jacqui Smith MP
The Home Secretary
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

Dear Mrs Smith

The quality of British mercy appears strained – Sri Lankan Tamil Asylum seekers on hunger strike in British detention centres – Britain continues to deport them to certain torture and death

It is reported that the health of the several dozen Tamil political asylum seekers in many of your detention centres is deteriorating rapidly with some being rushed to hospitals. The normal response of any human being is to preserve his own life and not to deliberately endanger it, unless the prospect facing him is even worse than death by starvation. I cannot imagine why these Tamils are to be forcibly deported to Sri Lanka when this country has been removed from the so-called White list of your Home Office indicating that it is not safe for Tamils.

I shall not burden you by repeating the facts and circumstances with which you must now be very familiar. But I am constrained to appeal to you as from one human being to another. I cannot do better than appeal to you in the words of PORTIA in Merchant of Venice, when I plead for your mercy on behalf of the several dozen Tamil asylum seekers who prefer the possibility of death by starvation in British jails to the certain torture and death that awaits them upon their arrival on deportation to Sri Lanka. These are but innocent young men inculcated with the fine spirit of hard work and enterprise and without a single criminal fibre in their bodies. Will you sacrifice their lives to the dragon of ethnic cleansing in Sri Lanka. Morally speaking, they may not be from Europe but yet are their lives not worth saving?

The quality of mercy is not strained,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:

.....
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes
But mercy is above this sceptred sway;
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice.

You cannot be unaware of the indiscriminate torture and killing of innocent Tamil civilians by the Sri Lankan police, armed forces and paramilitaries throughout Sri Lanka. How much more certain must the fate be of these hapless Sri Lankan Tamil asylum seekers in the hands of the current racist Sri Lankan government which even the United Nations and other international humanitarian organisations have reluctantly but incontrovertibly declared as egregious human rights violators.

The only apparent crime of these Tamils in your detention centres is that when they fled the evils of ethnic cleansing in their own land, they reposed their lives in the hands of the British government and the good people of Great Britain. These Tamils had nothing to fear since their experience of Britain as their former colonial masters was that of equality, justice, democracy and economic development.

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Is it therefore any surprise that their flight to freedom, justice and safety was to the very same Britain that had always been the refuge of political asylum seekers from time immemorial?

As Chairman of the Tamil Writers Guild which comprises a membership of British Tamil writers and professionals who have been long established in this country, I appeal to you to remove the constant threat of deportation hanging like a death sentence over the heads of these Tamils, in view of the threat to their lives as Tamils if returned to Sri Lanka. Consider what a human rights disaster it would be for the reputation of this country if these men were to die in their weakened state in flight while being returned. Please consider returning these men to the custody of their waiting relatives and friends in this country until you can take a final decision.

It is no more than what is just and fair in the circumstances currently prevailing in that country and the fair minded British people will applaud you for this action.

Thanking you for the favour of urgent action and an early reply.

Yours sincerely

Ivan Pedropillai B.Sc., M.Sc., FCCA, FCMA

Chairman, Tamil Writers Guild