

## EDITORIAL AND OPINION

## TAMIL GUARDIAN

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## Great Expectations

## Tamil anger is held in check by international commitments.

What is striking about Sri Lanka today is not the Sinhala-dominated state's long-standing, brutal and multi-faceted persecution of the Tamil people, but the paralysis of the international community as this now unfolds in plain sight. This week UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon was quoted as telling Sri Lanka that Colombo's 'failure' to rapidly resettle the nearly 300,000 Tamils incarcerated in militarized camps will result in growing 'bitterness'. The Sinhala state, he incredulously suggested, should "win the trust and confidence" of the Tamils. However, it is the international community's bewildered inaction - or, in some cases, continued support for Sinhala oppression - that is foremost in Tamil minds.

To begin with, the deprivations being endured today by the Tamils are not new. Whilst the sheer scale of the recent incarceration - almost 300,000 people - and the attendant suffering is striking, even by 2002, when the Norwegian-led peace initiative began, over 800,000 Tamils had been already displaced by Sri Lankan offensives. And even by then Sri Lanka's relationship with the Tamils was characterized by mass graves, 'disappearances', torture and rape. The Sinhala military's cold-blooded mass slaughter of tens of thousands of Tamil civilians between January and May 2009 had its genesis in the frequent mass-killings it has carried out throughout the three decades of war.

With the conventional defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Tamil people have turned decisively to the international community to ensure their security and wellbeing in the face of state-led Sinhala repression. Their expectations are based on the norms of global liberal governance that have emerged since 1990, norms that prioritize human rights over state sovereignty and redefine the latter as a responsibility, not a right.

In that way, the present Tamil 'turn' to non-violent agitation is not new: well before the Tamil liberation struggle took up arms, the entire range of peaceable efforts had been exhausted without any result: mass demonstrations, civil disobedience, backing parties articulating Tamil grievances, etc. It was amid the utter failure of such efforts - a failure encapsulated in the Sinhala imposition of the 1972 constitution - that the militants emerged.

And here is the rub: it was only after the Black July pogrom that armed militancy truly became the vanguard of Tamil

resistance. Even though the LTTE had been formed in 1976, it was only in 1983 that a fully fledged Tamil insurgency erupted. The tipping point was undoubtedly the popular sense of despair that gripped the Tamils - and the recognition that no alternative remained. The brief optimism heralded by India's intervention collapsed as Tamil bodies began to pile up again, this time before Indian guns.

Today's global terrain is very different to that of the eighties. Powerful states and an associated international network of NGOs, social movements and multi-lateral institutions have shaped an ever-advancing 'zone of peace' based on liberal democracy and free markets. But this emergent global order has also raised high expectations amongst oppressed peoples the world over; expectations not of the repressive states, but of those custodians of international liberal values.

The unequivocal statements by some Western states - for example, on accountability for war crimes, provision of security and a just political solution - (belatedly taken up by Mr. Ban Ki-Moon and others) have served to reinforce expectations amongst the Tamil people. Consequently, there has been an explosion in engagement between Tamil Diaspora groups and the international community.

It is clear that the latter is no monolith. Tamil groups and international actors appalled and shocked by the brazen cruelty of the Sinhala-dominated state are seeking international action to uphold the norms and laws that have come to define a global liberal order. At the same time, some states and international voices are advocating continued support for the Sinhala state. Their arguments are based on liberal enlightenment emerging eventually at some point to displace the Sinhala racism that swept President Mahinda Rajapakse to power.

The point here is that Tamil rage has been checked by very real expectations that international commitment to human rights, the 'responsibility to protect' and ending state repression everywhere will translate into concrete action. Since the defeat of the LTTE, numerous international actors have been warning that Sri Lanka 'risks losing the peace' or that Colombo's failure to address Tamil grievances will result in the reemergence of militancy ('terrorism'). However, the tipping point will come - again - when Tamil hopelessness replaces expectations.

## Vaddukkoaddai and Thimphu

## TamilNet Editorial Board

## TamilNet

CALLING for the creation of independent and sovereign Tamil Eelam, based on Vaddukkoaddai Resolution was the last spontaneous and definite mandate by Eelam Tamils in a totally free and democratic atmosphere.

As the need for democratic political organisation unfolds afresh, Tamils have to take up the thread directly from the Vaddukkoaddai Resolution.

The Thimphu principles and all the other formulas put forward subsequently under the duress of powers, and failed as negotiation models, do not get precedence over the VR as bases for political organization.

Mullivaaykkaal was not the real defeat. The defeat comes only when Tamils are made to politically denounce their heart-felt aspirations.

The diaspora needs to persevere and correct course of any proposal that stops just at self-determination. In UN charter and in international law it is just an empty phrase that doesn't protect nations or ethnicities.

The Vaddukkoaddai Resolution of 1976, calling for independent, sovereign, Tamil Eelam in the North and East of the island of Sri Lanka was a proclamation of all democratic Tamil political parties, including Ceylon Workers Congress, the then united political party of the Upcountry Tamils. The Eelam Tamil voters of the North and East overwhelmingly endorsed it in the 1977 elections. Thus it was a definite democratic mandate of Tamils and so far they didn't get another chance to democratically tell what is in their heart.

The Thimphu principles of 1985 were a diluted version of Vaddukkoaddai Resolution, after truncating independence and sovereignty and stopping just at Tamil nation, homeland and self-determination.

The Thimphu principles, diluted to facilitate negotiation with Colombo, were jointly put forward by all the Tamil militant organizations of that time and the TULF. There was no mandate of the people. The most important fact to be noted is that the Indian Establishment that was always keen in nullifying Tamil independence in the island was behind making Tamil militancy then under its influence agreeable to the principles as a minimum platform for negotiation.

The Indo-Sri Lanka agreement of 1987 imposed on Tamils touched only the point of homeland, that too temporarily, and it was recently breached by Colombo. There was no credible mandate as the LTTE boycotted and the elections took place under the coercing presence of the

Indian military. However, the provincial government elected under it finally felt it necessary to declare independent and sovereign Eelam, before winding up and while the Indian military was present.

The Oslo communiqué of 2002 was a further dilution of Vaddukkoaddai in another way, by its adoption of an invented phrase 'internal self-determination'. Norway and some other powers that later became the Co-Chairs were behind making the LTTE agreeable to experiment negotiation with this dilution. Again there was no mandate of people. LTTE's chief negotiator Anton Balasingham, writing in 2004, questioned the concept of Oslo Declaration and implied the expiry of LTTE's concession on internal self-determination.

The ISGA of 2003, which has reference to Vaddukkoaddai but not to Thimphu, was only an interim proposal during the Co-Chair sponsored peace. It was apparently a move of the LTTE to supersede Oslo Communiqué. The mandate it received from Tamils has to be considered limited as the elections took place with the 6th Amendment to the constitution in effect. Its only electoral validity today is that it binds the TNA.

Even after considerably diluting the freely mandated aspirations of Vaddukkoaddai Resolution to suit their geopolitical agenda, India and the Co-Chairs miserably failed in making the Sri Lankan state agreeable for experimenting political solutions.

Had they succeeded, there would have been a different course of events and they would have had a standing in telling the Tamil mind to consider experimenting within a united Sri Lanka. But they chose the path of brutally abetting or allowing a crushing military defeat and open as well as barbed-wire incarceration of the whole nation of Tamils in the island.

Eelam Tamils are now left with the option of politically organising themselves afresh.

In the emerging scenario of democratic organisation of Eelam Tamil politics there need to be no place for Thimphu, Oslo or any other - non mandated, experimental, and failed negotiation formulas extended by militancy under duress of powers.

If there is democracy then nothing should prevent the democratic stream to get back to what was last mandated by people and what has become the heart-felt need of Eelam Tamils more than ever now, and to begin the political process and negotiation from that point.

However, the very forces that