

NEWS

30,000 Tamils march in London over Sri Lanka's internment camps

TamilNet

MORE than 30,000 British Tamils marched to draw attention to the Sri Lankan government's continued incarceration of over 280,000 Tamils in military supervised camps despite earlier pledges to release within 180 days from the end of war in May.

Protesters, young and old, carried banners and chanted slogans expressing that 150 days have passed with no concrete steps taken to resettle the Tamils held in the "concentration camps" in Vavuniya.

The protest march, which coincided with the Hindu Deepavali (festival of lights) celebrations, started at 1:30 p.m. from Temple - Embankment Station, through central London, before the rally congregated at Hyde Park.

This protest comes at a time when the international community is indecisive of its future actions towards the Sri Lankan Government which has committed the worst human rights violations, and alleged war-crimes, spokesperson for the march organizers said.

A Tamil protester said, "This is just a start, we have started the countdown ... Tamils around the world will join in the campaign to unlock the concentration camps."

With hundreds of red and yellow Tamil Eelam flags, Union Jacks and United Nations Flags hoisted, the marchers harrowed large banners and pictures portraying the desperate situation faced by the Tamil internees in Sri Lanka.

Large bill-boards carried clips of the disturbing footage aired on Channel 4 News showing the shooting of gagged Tamil men by Sri Lankan forces.

Many carried placards and Banner messages of protest against the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon, whilst others hoisted flags of the United Nations, appealing to the UN to uphold international peace, security and human rights.

"We wouldn't be here if we didn't still have hope in the international laws that protect the fundamental rights of all citizens - we just want these rights to be upheld for Tamils in Sri Lanka," said a protester carrying a placard charging the UN Secretary General of being complicit in Genocide of Tamils.

A street performance of the "Concentration camps" and armed military imposing aggression on the Tamil Civilians grabbed the attention of many tourists and passers-by on central London streets, an attendee to the protest said.

The rally was joined by leading London parliamentarians, Columbian, Kurdish, Palestinian solidarity, members of Sikh communities in Britain, as well members of civil liberties and social justice organizations, according to the participants.

Ed Davey, MP for Kingston and Surbiton, acknowledged that the camps are "detention camps" and not internally Displaced Camps. He further stated "we must end the trade concessions... if they [Colombo] refuse to listen, if they do not set the people free from camps... they could face individual target sanctions against them." Davey strongly proposed a travel ban on Sri Lankan Diplomats visiting Europe.

Andrew Pelling, MP for Central Croydon, questioned "How can a 5-year-old child, who stands at the barbed wire, be a threat to the Sri Lankan government? It's clear Sri Lanka is willing to brand anyone, even a 5-year-old child, as a terrorist."

"Words are not enough when people are losing lives everyday... you need action and you need hope... Every individual who is in the camps should be returned to their home in peace and dignity," Lee Scott, MP for Ilford North said when he addressed the protesters.

Andrew Charalambous, Conservative PPC for Edmonton, one of the many Prospective parliamentary candidates who are working closely with the expatriate Tamils in the UK said, "Expulsion from Commonwealth... we shouldn't even be considering them to be part of GSP Plus in EU... [Sri Lanka] must be given a deadline to open the concentration camps... If not... we should work with the United Nations, to get a resolution and impose economic sanctions."

Andrew Higginbottom, Latin-American Solidarity, told the protesters "Sri Lanka sent their general to Europe to say that this video is a fabrication and a fraud. If it is a fabrication then you will open the doors of the detention camps, allow the UN investigators in there."

"I appeal to the Chairman of Marks and Spencer, Tesco, Asda to stop buying goods from this country until they unlock the camps," said Keith Vaz, MP for Leicester East and Chairman of the Home Affairs Select Committee.

Joan Ryan, MP for Enfield North, in her speech said "We call upon the United Nations to live up to its mandate to protect those whose human rights are being trampled under foot and speak up



and do all that it can on behalf of the Tamil people held in these camps."

Siobhain McDonagh, MP for Mitcham and Morden, "it cannot be right to keep a tenth of your population behind barbed wire at the same time as asking international community for aid to keep them there, and it's only the aid from the international community that is keeping them there."

"No government can stand aside while people are in imprisoned in the camps and enduring this intolerable suffering so we're calling upon all governments of

the world to move against Sri Lanka and demand the freedom the Tamil people in the camps," said John McDonnell, MP for Hayes and Harlington.

Sarah Colborne - Palestinian Solidarity, James Allie and Daniel Bessong - Councillors for Brent, Cllr Keith Prince - Leader of Redbridge, Cllr Julian Bell - Leader of the Ealing Labour Party and researcher for the All Party Parliamentary Group for Tamils (APPG-T), also addressed the rally.

Barry Gardiner, MP for Brent North, finished with a note of

hope from his own country's historical struggle. "I am a Scotsman, a small country oppressed for many, many, many years by the English. It took us 300 years, but eventually it was our king who took over the Crown of England... 'to serve justice', that is the message of hope... Pray to god, it doesn't take 300 years till we see justice in Sri Lanka."

Tamil Youth Organization (TYO), British Tamil Forum (BTF) and other Tamil representatives also addressed the rally with the event concluding at 6pm.