

## NEWS

# Canadian Tamils endorse Eelam

MEMBERS of the Canadian Tamil Diaspora have voted overwhelmingly in favour of the creation of an independent state of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka.

"I aspire for the formation of the independent and sovereign state of Tamil Eelam in the North and East territory of the island of Sri Lanka on the basis that the Tamils in the island of Sri Lanka make a distinct nation, have a traditional homeland and have the right to self-determination," read the vote statement.

A staggering 99.8% of the respondents voted in favour of it. 48,481 (99.82%) voted 'yes' and 85 (0.18%) voted 'no'. 17 votes were rejected, resulting in 48,583 voters overall. Over 2,000 volunteers helped to organise this historic event.

The vote statement is based on the famous 1976 Vaddukoddai Resolution, which called for the establishment of a state based on the traditional Tamil homeland in the North and East of Sri Lanka.

The resolution was endorsed in the 1977 parliamentary elections, the last set of elections before the start of the civil war and still echoes the political ambitions of Eelam Tamils across the globe today.

ES&S, recognised as the biggest International and North American election firm, managed and monitored the poll and the ballot choosing process.

"The basic freedoms and rights that we have here in Canada are not being upheld in Sri Lanka," said Darshika Selvasivam, a spokesperson for the Coalition for Tamil Elections

Canada, which organized the vote.

Many Canadian officials congratulated the Eelam Tamils for organising this referendum, allowing them to express their political will.

"As a government official in the city of Toronto, I think that is incredibly important to recognise the importance of democratic process of the fact that close to 50 000 people from the country, many of them right here in Toronto, have got out, got informed, and stood with the elections when they went out and voted in the free and fair elections," said Adam Giambrone, the chair of the Toronto Transport Commission and a Toronto City Councillor.

"That would give your community to stand up and speak for your issue knowing that they got the credibility of the entire community behind them."

Arthur Sheps, a history professor at the University of Toronto also commented on the elections.

"This will, they hope, give them a stronger political voice both on the world scene and also on the Canadian scene, in the sense that they can say to the government: 'This is what Tamil Canadians — who are Canadian voters after all — want.'"

The referendum follows similar votes held in France and Norway, both of which had similarly stunning results, with a near-perfect margin of victory.

A referendum is due to be held in Britain next on the 30th of January 2010.



## US Boycott Sri Lanka campaign steps up

TAMIL activists in America have been rapidly stepping up a boycott campaign, urging consumers to make an ethical choice and refuse to purchase goods made in Sri Lanka.

The latest in this movement was a viral video released by "Boycott Sri Lanka" as part of their "No Blood for Panties" video series.

Less than 10 days since the release of the video it has attracted the attention of many people in the textile industry of Sri Lanka and even US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Patricia Butenis.

"We have seen reports of the boycott. Private citizens have organized the action," said the ambassador.

"In the United States, citizens have the right to organise such campaigns and to decide what they buy."

The light-hearted video has already had nearly 10,000 views and is aimed at persuading consumers to boycott Sri Lankan made lingerie, a major industry for the country which supplies major brands such as Victoria's Secret.

Sri Lanka's textile industry netted a record \$3.47 billion from EU markets last year, making it the country's top source of foreign exchange, followed by remittances of \$3 billion and tea exports of \$1.2 billion.

The USA was Sri Lanka's single most important trading partner, receiving 23% of Sri Lankan

exports, and 40% of Sri Lanka's garment exports, amounting to \$1.9 billion in 2008.

"Sri Lanka uses tax revenue from the textile industry to oppress Tamil civilians and detain them in IDP internment camps," explained Anjali Manivannan from Boycott Sri Lanka.

"No Blood For Panties sends the powerful message that buying 'Made in Sri Lanka' items and supporting state-sponsored human rights violations is unsexy. It sends the message that being a conscious consumer is where true sexiness is."

Michael O'Rourke of Dimension7, directed the series of videos. "The story narrative of No Blood For Panties takes on the idea of how events in the far corners of the world impact our very personal lives," said O'Rourke.

"This video series turns the popular axiom of 'sex sells' on its head by using the same approach to actually promote activism."

The release of the video coincides with a series of protests being held across the USA.

Four protests have been held in Atlanta since September at North Point Mall, a super-regional shopping mall serving the affluent part of the metropolitan Atlanta.

Protestors held placards and distributed leaflets as protestors across the country united. Similar rallies were held in Florida and San Francisco with brands such as Gap and Victoria's Secret.

"The response from the public was very encouraging. There were about ten thousand cars cross that junction in those four hours, and we had a big "BOYCOTT SRILANKA" sign in the centre, which drew attention of the drivers; we were able to see most of the passengers in all lanes looking at the signs. Some of the drivers crossed lanes to get the information about the Boycott and picked the flyers," a Florida protest organizer said.

Activists in Washington DC and Delaware targeted Banana Republic stores, while in New York a large mobile billboard was used. A truck with a large billboard showing images of Tamil refugee suffering drove along popular shopping clusters in New York city, including 34th Street and Broadway. Lighting arrangements in the truck enabled the campaign to extend until early evening 7:00 p.m.

Organizers for the campaign said that the campaign will continue on a regular basis. "If sufficient donors show interest we are prepared to activate this campaign frequently to have maximum impact," an organizing member said.

The campaign places even more pressure on the Sri Lankan garment industry, with the recent suspension of the GSP Plus program. Campaigners have urged consumers across the globe to boycott Sri Lankan goods and encourage others to do follow.

