

## OPINION

# ‘Meaningful political reform and reconciliation should be priority’

**William Hague**

Speech at GTF launch

THANK you very much for your warm welcome. I am delighted to be here with you this afternoon and honoured to participate in the inaugural Global Tamil Forum conference. I would like to warmly return the welcome, especially to those of you who have travelled long distances and we are pleased that you have chosen to hold today's significant event in London. Your community has support in our parliament from all parties across the political spectrum, as evidenced by the large number of MPs who have addressed your conference during the course of the day. We all congratulate you on the establishment of the Global Tamil Forum which unites your diaspora from around the world.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the organising committee and the British Tamil Forum team for their efforts in bringing about today's important event and for their kind invitation to say a few words on behalf of the Conservative Party. Our leader, David Cameron, has asked me to convey his best wishes to you. We both share a great appreciation of the significant contribu-

tion of the Tamil diaspora to many aspects of our society here in Britain. That contribution, and indeed success, is built upon enterprise, community, family and taking responsibility for one's self. These are values that the Conservative Party also holds dear and will seek to advance if we are elected to form the next government in a few weeks' time. I believe that there is a natural affinity between Tamils in Britain and our Party. We strongly believe that there is a shared responsibility upon government, business, the voluntary sector, families and individuals to work together for the freedom and prosperity of this country and of the wider world – more so for those countries with which we hold close and historic ties.

Our links with the people and country of Sri Lanka are of course particularly strong. It was with huge sorrow that we witnessed the tragic unfolding of events last year, and the loss of so many innocent lives. As the military conflict in Sri Lanka reached its final stages, we shared the pain and anguish of members of the Tamil community in this country and around the world on behalf of their friends, families, and loved ones. Along with the rest of the international community, we urged the Sri Lankan government



to allow a humanitarian ceasefire to grant the innocent civilians safe departure from a zone of war. When the conflict was finally over we were unrelenting in our call for conditions in the displacement camps to be improved, for humanitarian and media agencies to be given full and unrestricted access, and for people to be returned to their homes as quickly as possible. Whilst approximately 190,000 people have been released, there are many others still housed in Menik Farm camp and we have repeatedly raised

this issue with the Sri Lankan government to allow them to leave. We must not forget their plight and their continued confinement will simply sow the seeds of discontent. This could lead to renewed conflict in years to come which would be a disastrous setback for the country.

The military conflict has now come to an end and we welcome the prospect of a future in which Sri Lanka is free from the instability and suffering which has blighted its shores for decades. However we are acutely aware

that peace still needs to be won and must be secured if it is to be lasting. For this reason we strongly urge President Rajapaksa's government to resolve the difficult political issues that remain and take immediate steps to address the concerns of the Tamil people and those of other minority groups. Meaningful political reform and reconciliation should be an urgent priority. This reform will only hold legitimacy if the democratic aspirations of all Sri Lankans, regardless of ethnicity, can be fulfilled. We believe all communities – Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims - should play a part in the future of the country if peace is to be secured in the long-term. We also believe there should be a full independent inquiry into alleged war crimes committed by both sides during the final stages of the military conflict. President Rajapaksa committed to the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon in May 2009 that the Sri Lankan government would investigate alleged violations but so far little concrete action has been taken. We have urged the Sri Lankan government to establish a thorough independent investigation, with assistance from the international community, into abuses

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# ‘Political reconciliation requires Tamil Diaspora’

**David Miliband**

Speech at GTF launch

I THINK that it is very significant indeed that the Global Tamil Forum should have brought people together from fourteen countries. That in itself is a huge achievement. It is a reflection of the breadth of the Tamil diaspora around the world and I hope it speaks to a unity that will serve the rights and hopes of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka.

It's also important to recognise the history that's associated with Britain's relationship with Sri Lanka. Father Emmanuel spoke about this. And I hope that not just historians, but Tamils will come to look back on this meeting in this building as being a time and a moment of significance for the future of Sri Lanka.

I also want to say that the foundation of the Global Tamil Forum, the inauguration of its international work, is an important moment for politics and above all politics in Sri Lanka, because there is no substitute for

political voice in asserting political rights. Tamils know to their cost the price of violence against them and in their name. We know that the civil war is over, but the civil peace has yet to be built and it is the dedication of this organisation to build a lasting equitable and enduring political civil peace that I think is the test of all of our effort.

I want to commend very, very strongly your decision to, not just to support non violence, but to advocate non violence. I think that history has shown time and again that lasting peace is not found through weapons and through warfare but through politics, however hard it is to persevere with it. We've seen this in our own United Kingdom, notably in the state of Northern Ireland, but also in other parts of the world and the road ahead no doubt will be long and hard in some ways that I will describe in a moment. But I think the founding commitment not just to a fully inclusive political process, but to support non violence as the means to achieve it, is something that speaks to the deepest values

of the Tamil people and actually, as I will say later, to the deepest values of people everywhere.

Perhaps I should say why I'm here. It's not just that London is the venue for this important meeting. It's that the importance of establishing a lasting peace in Sri Lanka matters. It matters because of the deep links that exist between Britain and Sri Lanka, the deep links that exist between British people and Sri Lankans of all kinds, and it's also that the future of Sri Lanka is important for the future of South Asia more generally. And I think that any Foreign Secretary would want to be here to listen, but also to support about the way ahead.

For twenty six years all the peoples of Sri Lanka suffered from the effects of civil war, but we know that while all communities were hit, the Tamil communities were the worst hit. We know that during the conflict Tamils were in every day fear for their lives, trapped between Government forces and the LTTE, many thousands killed we know, seventy thousand in total from all com-

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