



# தமிழ் இளைஞர் அமைப்பு Tamil Youth Organisation

Mr. Kingston  
The Oxford Union  
Frewin Court  
Oxford  
OX1 3JB

08/11/10

Dear Mr. Kingston

We note with regret that the Oxford Union invited Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa to present an address in mid November. Although, recent reports suggest the President Rajapakse is due to cancel his visit, we remain deeply disappointed that an invitation was made at all.

International human rights organisations including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the International Crisis Group have accused the Sri Lankan government of committing grave crimes, amounting to crimes against humanity, in the civil war that ended in May 2009 and the mass internment of Tamil civilians thereafter.

Sri Lanka has categorically refused to co-operate in an international and independent investigation into these allegations. President Rajapakse's government has also condemned a panel established by the UN Secretary General that is at present conducting an inquiry into the mechanisms of establishing accountability for Sri Lanka's abuses. Most recently the British Prime Minister, David Cameron has joined calls for an "independent investigation of what happened".

In these circumstances, it is disappointing to see an institution as august as the Oxford Union providing a platform for President Rajapaksa to attempt to justify his actions. It is especially saddening, given the amount of money the Sri Lankan government is spending on Public Relations firms in an effort to whitewash its crimes, that the Oxford Union has offered the President such a prestigious and high profile venue for free.

We know of your organisation's commitment to free speech. The Tamil Youth Organisation is also committed to free speech. However, President Rajapakse has crushed free speech in his own country and done his best to conceal from international attention the grave crimes committed in the Tamil speaking areas. To this day President Rajapakse's government forbids independent media organisations and international human rights organisations from entering the former war zones and collecting accurate information about the tens of thousands of Tamil civilians killed during the war or subsequently 'disappeared' whilst interned in Sri Lankan military detention camps.

Under these circumstances, we feel that any extension to the principle of free speech has to be balanced with the risk of providing a platform to a potential war criminal, whose victims have at present no right or reply or indeed possibility of redress.

The Oxford Union has in the past faced criticism for inviting other controversial speakers also known for their racist views. However, President Rajapakse is in a different position from either Nick Griffin or David Irving. These previous speakers live in countries with a free and independent media and the rule of

law. They could not therefore use the Oxford Union as a means of propagating unchallenged, noxious views or indeed as a platform for a campaign of concealment. President Rajapakse on the other hand, faces no risk of redress in his country and would have used his appearance at the Oxford Union to further his campaign, to prevent an independent investigation of his military's abuses in the Tamil speaking areas.

The Tamil Youth Organisation and the undersigned student bodies, hope that when considering such an invitation in the future, you will arrange for an alternative view to be aired at the same forum, perhaps from a representative from Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch, so as to present the audience with a more balanced understanding of the reality in Sri Lanka today.

Yours Sincerely

Mario Arulthas  
**Tamil Youth Organisation**

University Tamil Societies

