



June 17, 2020

Dear members of the Tamil community,

On June 16, 2020, the Chair of the Board and I met with members of the Tamil community who had contacted us to share concerns about a tweet that was shared from the Peel District School Board's account on June 4. We appreciated the opportunity to hear and learn from so many representative voices of the Tamil community.

I simply cannot imagine what it would be like in this day and age to either live through, be the victim of, or suffer through the loss of loved ones as so many in the Tamil community have in the genocide perpetuated by the Sri Lankan state against the Tamil people during that country's civil war ending in 2009.

The Peel Board was proud to recognize Tamil Genocide Remembrance Day with our public statement and tweet of May 18th. We stand by our statement honouring "the innocent lives that were lost, those who were displaced, and those who suffer trauma to this day." It is an important day that should and will continue to be publicly recognized by the Peel Board. I will ask, and have every reason to expect, Peel Board staff to be supportive of those activities and to engage in meaningful learning from them.

The fact that our "clarification" tweet of June 4, 2020, resulted in pain to Tamil students, their families and the Tamil staff causes me great sorrow. For that I offer an apology, not just on my behalf, but also on behalf of the Peel Board as a whole. I am sorry, and we will remove the tweet posted on June 4, 2020.

It is important for people to know that the tweet was not intended to back away from our recognition of the Tamil genocide. Rather it was an honest attempt to avoid reigniting the hate and fear of that civil war in our schools. While I can confirm that we received a formal letter of concern from the Consulate General of Sri Lanka, it was fears about student safety, voiced by parents of Sinhalese descent in our community that led to that second tweet.

We were wrong to not repeat the words "Tamil Genocide" in that second tweet and it was an even more significant mistake to imply that perspectives on a genocide needed to be balanced. That was not the intention.

As you suggested in our meeting, these unfortunate events highlight the need for the Peel Board to establish a transparent mechanism to support the impacted Tamil students, educators and parents/guardians in an ongoing manner. We must, as a board, strengthen our community ties to help us move our important work forward to eliminate anti-Black racism and other forms

of discrimination. An advisory group made up of Tamil community stakeholders is a great place to start. I would like one of their first discussions to be on your suggestions around the need for board-wide training about the history and experiences of the Tamil community and what that training should look like.

As an educator, I know the best way to influence future behaviour is to learn from past mistakes, no matter how difficult that past may be. That is why I am pleased to add my name to those who support the passage of Bill 104, an Act to proclaim Tamil Genocide Education Week. It was great to see the *Tamil Genocide Education Week Act, 2019*, introduced by Scarborough-Rouge Park Member of Provincial Parliament Vijay Thanigasalam and supported by Minister of Education Stephen Lecce, receive unanimous support at Second Reading. We look forward to Bill 104's passage to help ensure the heinous acts of the Tamil Genocide are learned, remembered and never happen again.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Joshua". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P" and a long, sweeping underline.

Peter Joshua  
Director of Education  
Peel District School Board