

Tamil Youth Organisation United Kingdom

'Empowering youth to excel as leaders and architects of our nation'

Press Release

Tamil Youth Organisation – United Kingdom, condemns the platform given to Sri Lankan officials to conceal the Country's genocidal agenda



Ranil Wickremesinghe is reported to speak on the topic of 'Geopolitics of the Indian Ocean region' at Oxford Union, on 8th October. Previously in 2010, Oxford Union gave a platform to Mahinda Rajapaksa to justify his genocidal killings that was later cancelled amidst protests. We note, with regret, that the Oxford Union has now invited Sri Lanka's current Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, whose primary aim is to escape from the pressure of the Human Rights Council and to divert the importance given to human rights abuses of the State in the international arena.

Whilst Sri Lanka's political institutions continue to target the dignity, liberty and livelihood of Tamils with anti-Tamil policies, and with Sri Lanka's commitment towards transitional justice being questioned by the United Nations Human Rights Council and the Commissioner, it seems distasteful for such an offender to be given a platform at a prestigious institution to speak on a subject far removed, avoiding his own ongoing contributions to such pressing matters. As a democratic society based on the pillars of justice and accountability, we should encourage the world community to ask more questions about Sri Lanka's commitment towards fundamental human rights, not giving a platform to talk about 'Geopolitics of the Indian Ocean region'. It only serves to weaken the international pressure on Sri Lanka, and its institutions, to commit to justice and a lasting long-term peace. Sri Lanka tends to use these platforms to alleviate the public and international community's pressure away from evident anti-Tamil policies in Sri Lanka¹, thus allowing the Sri Lankan government to deviate from United Nations' criticism over human rights violations and the lack of process in transitional justice thereafter².

Sri Lanka is a state that constitutionally denies the Tamils' right to self-determination, even though the United Nations Charter classifies self-determination as a fundamental right. As a member of this State, Ranil Wickremesinghe has played many parts in abusing the basic rights of Tamils in the island. Ranil Wickremesinghe held a top ministerial position³ during the Black July pogrom in 1983, when the Sri Lankan government organised mobs and security forces to kill and rob Tamils in the State's capital, Colombo. A great many of the Tamil diaspora residing in the United Kingdom today fled the nation during Black July and its aftermath. In 2009, during the Mullivaikkal genocide, Ranil Wickremesinghe was the opposition leader, who never voiced against the onslaught of Tamils by the military and security forces. Rather, the Party stood with the President and his allies, aiding and abetting them to commit genocidal massacres. During the peace talks between the Sri Lankan government and the leaders of the Tamil armed resistance, namely the LTTE, Ranil Wickremesinghe agreed to instate a federal solution for the Tamils and end illegal government land encroachment of the Northern and Eastern parts of Sri Lanka, Tamil Eelam. The notorious Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) was implemented when Ranil Wickremesinghe was holding the office of a ministerial position. He aided to implement this piece of legislation, and to date upholds its selective practice against Tamils to oppress and terrorise the Tamil community.

¹ PPT verdict finding Sri Lanka guilty of the crime of genocide and ongoing genocide
<https://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=36994>

² United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism Ben Emmerson
https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/LK/Sri_LankaReportJuly2018.PDF

³ Mathew, Wickremasinghe and Jayasuriya advanced Sinhalese anger as the cause of the violence and failed to distance the Government from its planning and execution.
<https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/july-1983-ranil-wickremasinghe-followed-cyril-mathew/>

There are many demonstrations continuing to take place in the North-Eastern part of the Island, the traditional homeland of the Tamils (Tamil Eelam), calling for self-rule and against ongoing militarisation, forced land grabbing and State abetted illegal Sinhala settlements. Mothers and relatives of enforced disappeared Tamils in Tamil Eelam have been continuously demonstrating for more than six hundred days⁴. Most of the disappeared persons were either handed over by the families to the military for security checks, or forcefully abducted by the Sri Lankan security forces⁵. UK Parliamentarians showed solidarity to the Tamils protesting and called for immediate international pressure⁶. The Prime Minister of Sri Lanka or its other government officials show no empathy for the people requesting answers for the disappeared and demanding basic rights on the ground. Instead, Sri Lanka spends millions annually to foster a good international image at the detriment of people fighting for their rights. Recently, the United Nations and the local elected body (Northern Provincial Council) pointed out the lack of political will within the Sri Lanka's institutions to provide any justice to Tamils or treat them as fellow citizens⁷. It was quoted that "none of the measures so far adopted to fulfil Sri Lanka's transitional justice commitments are adequate to ensure real progress. [The] Tamil community remains stigmatised and disenfranchised"⁸.

One could argue that the Oxford Union is adhering to freedom of speech, but Sri Lankan officials use this notion of selective 'freedom of speech' incessantly to cover up their genocidal crimes⁹, whilst continuing to restrict this very right through the Constitution for large parts of their population. Sri Lanka's top government officials repeatedly boast that they are using all the avenues to save the accused military and government officials accused of genocidal crimes. These kinds of platforms help to create a good image of Sri Lanka at the cost of ordinary people fighting for their fundamental rights and livelihood. We, the young Tamil population of the United Kingdom, condemn the platform given to Sri Lankan officials to cover up the Country's genocidal agenda on Tamils and ease the United Nations pressure on Sri Lanka and its military officials. We ask that instead Oxford Union should take steps to counter Sri Lanka's stance on human rights, questioning its institutionalised anti-Tamil policies.

Tamil Youth Organisation UK – a member of the international Tamil Youth Organisation that is established in 11 different countries connecting the Tamil youth globally.

⁴ 500 days of protest: enough is enough

<https://www.srilankacampaign.org/500-days-of-protest-enough-is-enough/>

⁵ Sri Lanka: 'Disappearances' by Security Forces a National Crisis - Human Rights Watch

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2008/03/06/sri-lanka-disappearances-security-forces-national-crisis>

⁶ I call on the government of Sri Lanka to fulfil the demands of the protestors, and for members of the international community to bring pressure to bear to ensure that it delivers. As we mark this 500th day of protest, it is time to say, 'enough is enough'.

Paul Scully MP

⁷ "Authorities have not yet demonstrated the capacity or willingness to address impunity for gross violations and abuses of international human rights law and serious violations of international humanitarian law".

<https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/northern-provincial-council-calls-%E2%80%98international-justice-mechanism%E2%80%99-accountability-sri-lanka>

⁸ United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism Ben Emmerson

https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/LK/Sri_LankaReportJuly2018.PDF

⁹ 'The government defends the security of all war heroes from the Army Commander to the last soldier (accused of genocidal crimes) and the government would not allow any foreign forces to lay hands on war heroes who laid down their lives to defend the country.' President Maithripala Sirisena

<https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sirisena-says-determined-protect-war-heroes-foreign-forces>

New Justice Minister of Sri Lanka vows not to send any war hero to international courts

http://www.colombopage.com/archive_17B/Aug31_1504199406CH.php

"Saved Rajapaksa from international war crimes court": President Sirisena

<https://www.dnaindia.com/world/report-saved-rajapaksa-from-international-war-crimes-court-lankan-president-sirisena-2177515>