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The Tamil Civil Society Forum wishes to express its support for the people's protests dawning in the South of Sri Lanka in recent days.

The unfolding of events in the Island over the present economic crises is new in character and have no precedent in modern history in the South of Sri Lanka. In particular, the involvement and participation of the Southern youth in these protests bring some sense of hope. The mass of protestors at Galle Face Green – in particular the youth in great numbers – has been staging an ‘occupied protest’ for the last 10 days. This is a new development in the South.

Your government leaders who have slaughtered us over the years have today turned their weapons towards you. We perfectly understand the pain and loss of death and violence. Despite the death of hundreds and thousands of our own people, our hearts have not frozen but are still warm and tender with feelings of empathy. The government atrocities and losses incurred at Rambukkana even today bring tears to our eyes and our hearts are weeping.

In this context, the Tamil Civil Society Forum wishes to express its moral solidarity to the common people of the South, who are staging a variety of agitations in the context of the current economic crisis in the Island.

However, in the light of our lived experiences for the last eight decades, Tamils have certain reservations about joining hands together with the mass protestors of the South, in your protests and agitations.

By raising the question of ‘Who is responsible for this current economic crisis?’ and providing an answer ‘Solely the Rajapakshe family’, the people of the South are united in an unprecedented manner under the banner #GotaGoHome. However, as Tamils, our painful history leads us to different perspectives and answers.

The Presidential election of 2015 was won on a similar theme of sending Mahinda Home. The failures of the 2015 experience, which is the most recent historical example taught us the gross insufficiency of merely sending a particular ruler home. The undeniable truth is that the change of government in 2015 did not change anything for the Tamil people, or address any of the root causes of the structural genocide.

The First Constitution of independent Ceylon failed to protect the Tamils and up-country Tamils from the denial of their rights. The fundamental tenet of the successive constitutions has been the supremacy of Sinhala-Buddhism. These constitutions were designed primarily to oppress non-Sinhala Buddhist nations and communities, and to entrench Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. The successive constitutions and constitutional amendments were designed to expedite oppression by centralizing the power and authority. The Government’s economic policy, other policies impacting the economy, and operational decisions were carried out on the strength and context of these Sinhala-Buddhist Constitutions. Ultimately, it is these oppressive Constitutions that molded the characters and contents of Bandaranayake, Dudley, Sirimao, JR Jayawardene, Premadasa, Chandrika, Ranil, and the Rajapakshes.

While the country is reaping the impacts of all successive Governments after the independence, the tendency of the southern populace to solely blame the Rajapakshe family for the entire economic crisis, and absolving the other Sinhala politicians and bureaucrats is not new.

In the modern history of Sri Lanka, all the governments that governed Sri Lanka have been corrupted and implemented wrong economic policies to the detriment of the country as a whole. The Sinhala people chose to ignore all the corruption and wrong economic policies because the rulers portrayed themselves as the protectors and guardians who uphold the aspirations of the Sinhala-Buddhist supremacy. The current crisis is the ultimate outcome of this historical process.

Except for a limited few, the majority in the South did not raise their voice against, marginalizing the Upcountry Tamils who brought valuable foreign exchange and commerce to the country through their hard work; spending millions of rupees to take away the lands from the Tamils and colonize Sinhalese under the guise of agricultural settlements for development; depriving a quarter of the population their language rights and alienating them from the workforce under the Sinhala Only Act; depriving the Tamils of job opportunities by enforcing the use of Sinhala as the official language, especially in the Government sector; discrimination against Tamils in the sphere of higher education through standardization; preventing Tamils from attaining economic prosperity during the pre-war and post-war periods through the government's planned deprivation of development in the Tamil areas; the destruction of economies in the North-East; and forcing the Tamil youth through various intimidating practices to leave the country. The majority of the people in the south neither recognized nor opposed these actions which were detrimental to the economy as a whole. Even today, nobody acknowledges the same. On the contrary, those who promised more and more acts of structural genocide continuously won the elections, held the power, and were praised as national heroes.

The racial pogroms in 1956, 1958, 1977, and 1983 were unleashed against Tamil people to murder them and vandalize their property, without realizing the jeopardy to the backbone of the entire economy of the country. Politicians who orchestrated the pogroms and/or failed to prevent them continued in office in the subsequent elections and have never been rejected for what they did.

Tamil people protested through non-violent options against these genocidal acts. Yet these protests were suppressed using violent means. In particular, 66 years ago on the 05th of June 1956, at the same Galle Face Green, Tamils sat peacefully, protesting the Sinhala Only Act, and were met with violent dispersal. On the same day, 150 innocent Tamil farmers were killed in the Gal Oya settlement area. Neither politicians nor the public from the South raised their voice even on the economic grounds, let alone concerns on humanitarian grounds. No leader who could stand on moral grounds and oppose these undemocratic acts emerged from the South.

As consequence, when the Tamils' reasonable political rights were taken away and their non-violent protests were suppressed, they were compelled to take up arms. The Sri Lankan state chose to respond to it through violence. None of the politicians from the South came forward to advocate for a non-violent resolution of the conflict. On the contrary, the government used up the nation's wealth, borrowed loans, and continued the genocidal war for which the South has always been supportive. They continued to elect leaders who they considered suitable to pursue the military onslaught against Tamils.

In the brutal end, the Rajapakshe government deceptively called the final stages of the war a 'humanitarian operation' and conducted atrocities far beyond the previous brutalities, murdering unarmed civilians which was a clear act of genocide. At the end of 2009, at Mullivaikkal, the government terminated the armed struggle of the Tamil people through the first genocide of the 21st Century in the world. The South

celebrated it as a great victory at that time but awakened today to reality. Asking the so-called victorious heroes to 'go home' is nothing but a dramatic irony of the time.

It cannot be forgotten that today the same South that looks shocked at the corruption of the Rajapakshe family is the one and the same that helped the Rajapakshe family to gain unprecedented victory in the Presidential election in 2019 and the Parliamentary election of 2020. In 2015, the ordinary Sinhalese voters in the South were frustrated and upset by the prolonged corruption of the Rajapakshe family for 10 years. So, they kept themselves away from voting. The Tamils and Muslims voted against the Rajapakshe family which made it possible to prevent the Rajapakshe family from coming back to power. However, within five years, the superiority complex of the majoritarian Sinhala Buddhists was evoked accusing the minorities of being the deciding factors in the election of the country's Government. The Easter attacks inflamed animosity towards the Muslims, with the fear psychosis that the Ranil–Maithri coalition would give political rights to the Tamils, the Sinhala nation rose in unity and once again reinstated the largest corruption-riddled Rajapakshe family on the throne. What caused this change to come about among the Southern voters within five years? For the Southern voters, other matters were far more important than the corruption of the Rajapakshes. The identity of the Rajapakshe family as the uncompromising protectors of Sinhala-Buddhist dominance compared to the other candidates prevailed in Sinhala voters' decisions to place them in power.

Even today, the Tamils have a long and exhausting list of grievances. Apart from the destruction of the overall ethnic identity, there are other matters that deeply affect the hearts and minds of the Tamil people. The kiths and kins of those who were arrested, abducted, surrendered, and handed over to the military by their families at the end of the war and subsequently made to 'disappear' by the Sri Lanka armed forces have staged a daily protest for over 1000 days now are on streets searching for information and seeking justice. People are still waiting anxiously for the day to dawn to settle in their own residential and cultivable lands which have been forcibly taken over by the Forest Department, the Archaeological Department, the Tri-forces, and by every other means possible. Several others languish in the prisons for many years without investigations etc. For all this pain and agony, we have not heard any voice from the South in solidarity - not even a voice of empathy expressed.

Neither the Sri Lankan governments nor the intellectuals expressed any concern or worry in the last 13 years since the end of the war at Mullivaikkal over the lack of foreign investment in Sri Lanka. When Sri Lanka was accused at the UN Human Rights Council over the alleged war crimes, or when initially losing the GSP+ tax concession of the European Union due to the lack of progress on the Human Rights situation in Sri Lanka, no voices were raised from the South calling for a mutual settlement of grievances of the other nations and communities to save the economy of the country. Instead, the Government of Sri Lanka approached countries that have no emphasis on human rights and accountability for financial assistance. This evasive strategy was also welcomed by the South. Our understanding is the present economic crisis is the cumulative manifestation of all of the above malaises.

The wrong political decisions taken to this day in the history of Sri Lanka, including the poor economic decisions, the condoning of corruption, and the acceptance of irregularities in governance are emanating from the pursuance of the Sinhala Buddhist dominance, which is at the core of the Constitution and the state.

We have not seen any acknowledgment even today amongst the youth and common protestors in the South that the current crisis is a by-product of the mishandled racial situation, brought about by Sinhala Buddhist aspiration for dominance. We are yet to hear from the young protestors at Galle Face Green today expressing any progressive thoughts along these lines.

There are slogans such as ‘the politicians have divided us along racial lines’, ‘we are all Sri Lankans’, ‘the National anthem can be sung in Tamil’. For us, these are skin deep. We have not come across any voices of concern that address the rightful fear and apprehensions of the Tamils, other nations, and communities and proposals to overcome these deep-rooted structural issues. Tamils’ issues are much graver, much more painful, and much more fearsome than singing the National anthem in Tamil. Tamils’ survival as a nation in this country is threatened today, and those calling us from the South to join the protest seem not to have understood or felt this fear dwelling within us.

The failure to understand and come to grips with the unfathomable loyalty of the Sinhalese to the prominent place for Sinhala-Buddhism in Sri Lanka, the Mahavamsa mindset, and the blind commitment to the unitary state has polarized the Sinhala nation and other nations and communities and has caused the current situation in the country. The failure of both common protestors and leaders of the protests to read the signs early on and address Tamils’ historic grievances is being felt by us at this crucial juncture. We have not noticed any signals from any of the protestors regarding this.

We acknowledge that it is only from the Galle Face Green, at least some proposals are being made against the Rajapakshe government. However, none of them are addressing the issues of the Tamil people, the other nations, and communities, and proposing solutions to their sufferings. To be truthful, the fact that even those present at the protest site have not addressed the true root of this economic crisis shows us the entrenched nature of Sinhala Buddhist dominance and the lack of alternatives.

Further, the proposal today for the change of government is not going to give anything to the Tamils. In 2015, there was a change through the support of the Tamil-speaking people/nations, but even then, the Maithri – Ranil alliance did not change the approach of their government towards the Tamils and other nations. Deluding Tamils and wooing them into their company, the government did programs like the construction of 1000 viharas on the traditional Tamil homelands, in order to keep continuance of structural genocide against Tamils. Not only that, but we have also not forgotten that the Maithri – Ranil government removed the hindrances to their chauvinist agenda in Geneva using the help of Tamil representatives.

Against this backdrop, we, the Tamils, view the protests happening in the South with solidarity and yet at the same time have no other choice than to be cautious and prudent in our decision to join hands with the protestors, considering our long struggle for a secured existence in our homeland.

Today, we wish to extend our solidarity with those of you in the South, the common people, and the youth. We also state firmly that we are also affected by the same economic reasons for which you stepped into the road to protest. Our reservations in joining your protests and standing shoulder-to-shoulder with you are because of the exhausting, and the lingering question we still have in our minds – at least do you have an answer for the quests, that we the Tamils have for protecting/preserving our status as a distinct nation?

Signed
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Signed
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