

The Tamil Freedom Struggle in Sri Lanka

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First edition 2009; updated edition 2012

ISBN 978-1-876646-65-3

Published by Resistance Books, resistancebooks.com

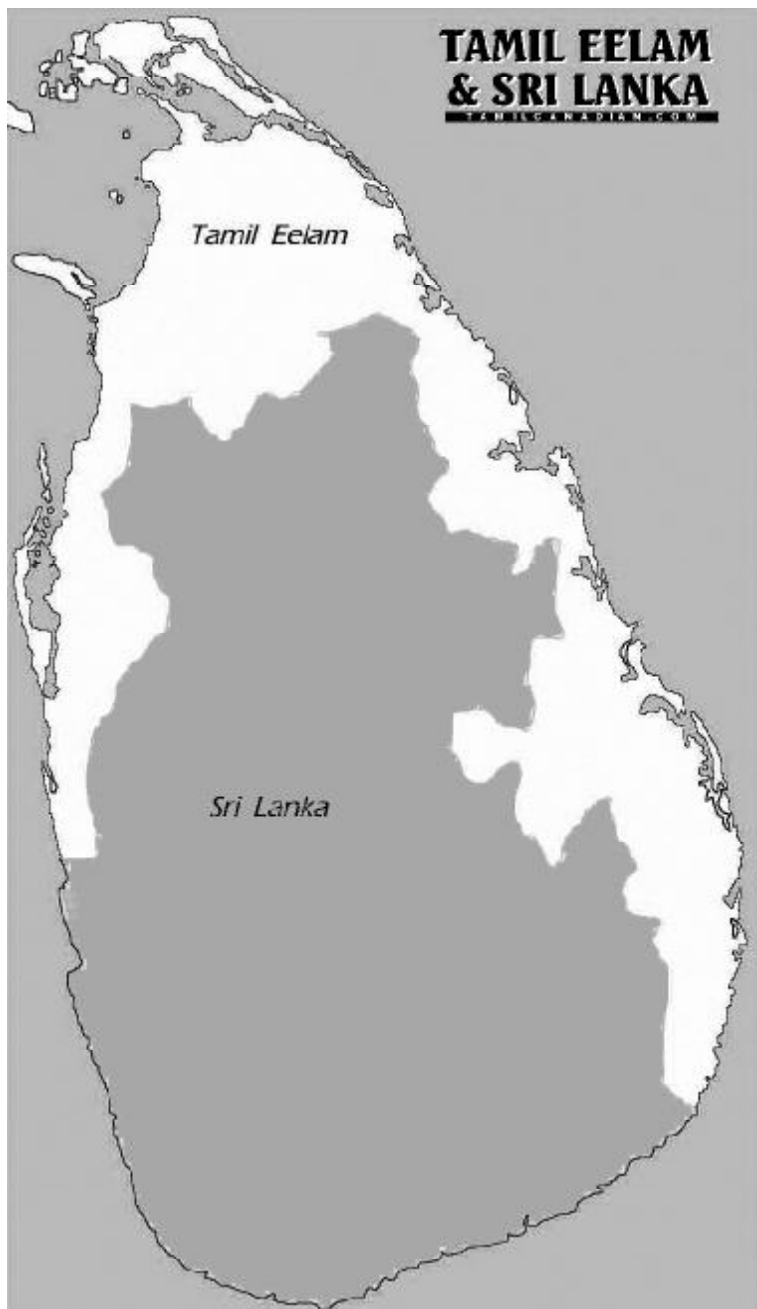
Chronology of Key Events

- 1833 British combine the Tamil kingdom (north and east of the island) and Sinhalese Kingdoms (south/central) to create single colony of Ceylon.
- 1948 Ceylon granted independence as a single unit. Tamil plantation workers deprived of citizenship.
- 1956 Government makes Sinhalese the only official language for the island. Tamils peacefully protest; hundreds killed. Military rule commences in Tamil homelands.
- 1972 Ceylon proclaims new constitution and changes name to Sri Lanka. Makes Buddhism the state religion and reinforces Sinhalese as the only national language.
- 1972 Tamil youth, who have been denied entry to education and job opportunities, form into multiple clandestine movements. The Tamil New Tigers (later called Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) is one of them.
- 1976 All Tamil political parties based in the northeast declare support for return to original free sovereign status. Tamil Tiger leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran declares fight for independence.
- 1977 In Sri Lankan elections Tamil United Liberation Front wins by landslide in Tamil areas, with mandate to form separate state of Tamil Eelam. Violence against Tamils kills hundreds. Tamil military struggle commences.
- 1978 Sri Lankan constitution amended to ban advocacy of separatism by members of parliament.
- 1983 Island-wide pogrom against Tamils; at least 3000 Tamils die.
- 1984-87 War between Tamil Tigers and Sri Lankan forces intensifies.
- 1987 India intervenes and sends "peace keeping force". Accord signed between Indian and Sri Lankan governments. Tamils not consulted, but given limited reforms. Fighting erupts between Indian and Tamil Tiger forces. Tamil Tigers flee to jungles.
- 1988-90 India occupies Tamil areas in north and east of Sri Lanka. Over 8000 Tamil

civilians killed. India withdraws troops without resolution. Tamil Tigers take control of most of Tamil homeland. War resumes between Sri Lanka and Tamil Tiger forces.

- 1991 Ex-Indian PM Rajiv Gandhi killed in bomb blast. Tigers accused of the killing.
- 1994 Chandrika Kumaratunga wins Sri Lankan elections on peace platform, declares truce. Peace talks break down after several months and fighting resumes.
- 1996-97 Sri Lankan forces take over Jaffna. Over 400,000 Tamils flee into jungles with Tamil Tigers. Several thousand civilians die. Tigers establish mini-state.
- 2000 Tigers take control of large areas of the Tamil homeland, including parts of Jaffna, in major battle victories against Sri Lanka forces.
- 2001 Jul: Tigers attack main airforce base in Colombo.
- 2002 Feb: Ceasefire agreement signed between Sri Lanka and Tamil Tigers. Tamil Tigers declare willingness to live within Sri Lanka in a federation.
- 2003 Tamil Tigers submit plans for self-rule within Sri Lanka, later rejected by Sri Lanka. Peace talks break down but ceasefire continues.
- 2004 Dec: Tsunami strikes north/east; 30,000 Tamils killed. Sri Lanka agrees to new peace proposals for joint administration for rebuilding with foreign aid. New agreement not implemented by Sri Lanka and north/east is not rebuilt.
- 2005 Nov: New Sri Lankan president Rajapakse comes to power on war platform. Undeclared war escalates.
- 2007 Sri Lankan army captures a large amount of territory in the east of the island.
- 2008 Jan: Sri Lanka officially withdraws from cease fire agreement and commences all-out offensive to capture all Tamil tiger controlled areas.
- 2009 Jan: Sri Lankan military captures LTTE capital Kilinochi. Thousands of combatants die on both sides. 250,000 Tamils flee to coastal Tamil Tiger-held areas.
- Apr: Sri Lankan military corners over 150,000 civilians and remaining Tamil Tigers in small coastal area north of Mullaitivu and demands unconditional surrender of all Tigers. Thousands of civilians killed in bombardment of area by government forces.
- May: Government claims victory.

**TAMIL EELAM
& SRI LANKA**



Tamil Eelam

Sri Lanka

The Tamil Freedom Struggle in Sri Lanka

By Chris Slee

In May 2009 the Sri Lankan government finally defeated the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, a group which had fought for more than 30 years for an independent state for the Tamil people living in the northern and eastern parts of the island of Sri Lanka.

The human cost of this victory by the racist Sri Lankan government has been enormous.

The LTTE had been the de facto government of large parts of the north and east. During 2009, as the LTTE was forced to retreat into an ever-smaller area of the northeast coast, hundreds of thousands of civilians went with them. The Sri Lankan army, navy and air force bombarded the ever-diminishing LTTE-controlled area, killing an unknown but very large number of people.

According to a tally compiled by the United Nations and confirmed by the International Committee of the Red Cross, a total of 6432 civilians were killed in a three month period beginning in late January — an average of 70 per day.¹ Subsequently the situation became even worse. Rescue workers counted more than 1200 bodies following a massive bombardment by the Sri Lankan army using cluster ammunition, multi-barrel rocket launchers and cannons on the night of May 9 and the morning of May 10.² Former United Nations spokesperson in Sri Lanka Gordon Weiss has said that the death toll in the final 16 weeks was “between 10,000 and 40,000 people”.³

The Sri Lankan armed forces repeatedly carried out aerial and ground artillery bombardment of hospitals and other facilities in LTTE-controlled areas, and imposed a blockade preventing the delivery of food and medical supplies to the people in these

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areas.

Referring to the shelling of a major hospital at Puthukkudiyiruppu (PTK), Gordan Weiss says: “This shelling would be one of approximately 65 recorded attacks that ensued in the following months on hospitals and clinics. The attacks ranged from those on large hospitals such as PTK’s main government hospital to the small makeshift medical shelters repeatedly established by the Tamil government doctors as the lines moved”.⁴

Human Rights Watch described these attacks on hospitals as war crimes.⁵

Those who fled to government-controlled areas to escape these horrendous conditions were put in concentration camps surrounded by barbed wire.

The total number of deaths in the 30 year war is unknown, but certainly exceeded 100,000. Hundreds of thousands of people were injured, and vast numbers were displaced from their homes, many repeatedly.

While the Tamils have been the main victims of the war, it has also affected Sri Lanka’s Sinhalese majority. The war has diverted resources away from economic development and social welfare. Thousands of soldiers in the Sri Lankan army, which is almost entirely Sinhalese in composition, and is recruited mainly from the rural poor, have been killed.

Repression of dissent has accompanied the war, and has resulted in the deaths of a number of journalists. The best known case is that of Lasantha Wickramatunga, editor of the *Sunday Leader*, whose statement predicting that he would be murdered by the government was published in his newspaper after his death.⁶

Attacks on journalists have continued after the end of the war. An example is journalist and cartoonist Prageeth Eknaligoda, who has been missing since January 24, 2010, when he was abducted by suspected government agents.

Origins of the conflict

The roots of the conflict lie in a long history of state oppression of the Tamils, which eventually led some Tamil youth to take up arms against the government.

When the British granted formal independence to Sri Lanka (then called Ceylon) in 1948, they handed over power to politicians drawn mainly from the upper classes of the majority Sinhala ethnic group. These politicians used racism as a tool to divide the working class. They also used it as a weapon in their struggles with each other: different Sinhalese politicians would compete to show that they were the strongest defenders of the Sinhalese people. This resulted in the adoption of racist policies and the stirring up of antagonism against the Tamil minority.

One of the newly independent state’s first acts was to deprive Tamil plantation

workers of citizenship rights. These workers were descended from people brought to Sri Lanka from India by the British in the nineteenth century to work on coffee and tea plantations. Despite the fact that their families had lived in Sri Lanka for several generations, a million people were denied Sri Lankan citizenship, being defined as “Indians”!

The citizenship law did not directly affect the main group of Tamils, whose ancestors had lived in the north and east of the island of Sri Lanka for thousands of years. But it was soon followed by new laws adversely affecting all Tamils. In 1956 Sinhalese was declared the sole official language of Sri Lanka, a move which made speakers of the Tamil language second-class citizens. Knowledge of Sinhalese was made a prerequisite for employment in the public service, thereby excluding most Tamils from government jobs. Discrimination against Tamils was also applied in education.

For many years Tamils opposed these discriminatory laws by peaceful means, including demonstrations, sit-ins and participation in elections. But peaceful protests were met by violent repression, carried out by the police and army as well as racist Sinhalese mobs incited to violence by politicians and Buddhist monks. There was a series of pogroms against Tamils, culminating in the murder of an estimated 3000 people in the government-instigated riots of July 1983.

LTTE theoretician Anton Balasingham argued that:

The anti-Tamil riots that periodically erupted in the island should not be viewed as spontaneous outbursts of inter-communal violence between the two communities. All major racial conflagrations that erupted violently against the Tamil people were inspired and masterminded by the Sinhala regimes as a part of a genocidal programme. Violent anti-Tamil riots exploded in the island in 1956, 1958, 1961, 1974, 1977, 1979, 1981, and in July 1983. In these racial holocausts thousands of Tamils, including women and children were massacred in the most gruesome manner, billions of rupees worth of Tamil property was destroyed and hundreds of thousands made refugees. The state’s armed forces colluded with the Sinhalese hooligans and vandals in their violent rampage of arson, rape and mass murder.⁷

The growth of resistance

The growing repression led to the growth of Tamil nationalist sentiment. In 1977 the Tamil United Liberation Front won 17 seats in the Sri Lankan parliament on a platform of self-determination for Tamils.

The repression of peaceful protest led many Tamil youth to turn to violent methods. Several armed groups were formed. The main such group was the Liberation

Tigers of Tamil Eelam, which was formed in 1972 under the leadership of Vellupillai Prabhakaran, then a young man about 17 years old. The LTTE carried out its first major armed action in 1978. After the 1983 pogrom, the LTTE gained increased support from the Tamil community and dramatically stepped up its war against the Sri Lankan army.

The government forces were unable to defeat the LTTE and other militant groups, despite brutal repression including numerous massacres of Tamil civilians. In June 1985 a ceasefire was agreed between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil groups. But the Sri Lankan army continued to carry out large-scale killings of civilians, and soon the war broke out again.

Indian intervention

After the 1983 massacre, Indian public opinion was very sympathetic to the Tamils. This was particularly the case in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, where hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated in solidarity with the Tamils of Sri Lanka, and the chief minister called for Indian intervention.

India began putting pressure on the Sri Lankan government to make concessions to the Tamil people. This pressure included public statements and diplomatic messages. But the Indian government, through its intelligence agency called the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), also began secretly providing arms and training to Tamil militant groups.

However, India wanted to keep tight control over the Tamil groups. It did not want an independent Tamil state on the island of Sri Lanka, which might have inspired separatist sentiments in India itself, including amongst the people of Tamil Nadu. India advocated limited autonomy for the Tamil areas within a united Sri Lanka, and pressured the Tamil groups to accept this.

In 1987 India sent a “peace keeping force” to Sri Lanka, with the ostensible aim of protecting the Tamils from the violence of the Sri Lankan army. However the Indian government did not want to see the creation of an independent Tamil state, and the Indian army soon began repressing the LTTE. The Indians tried to use some other Tamil armed groups as a counter-weight to the LTTE. These groups became collaborators of the Indian army against the LTTE.

In 1988, Ranasinghe Premadasa was elected as president of Sri Lanka. He was no friend of Tamils, having been prime minister during the 1983 pogrom. Nevertheless, he opposed the continued presence of Indian troops, and started talks with the LTTE. He even secretly gave the LTTE some arms to fight the Indian troops. But he remained opposed to self-determination for the Tamils, and once the Indian army had withdrawn,

fighting broke out once again between the Sri Lankan army and the LTTE.

Peace negotiations

There were a number of attempts to reach a peaceful settlement to the war.

Chandrika Kumaratunga was elected prime minister in 1994 after campaigning on a peace platform. A ceasefire was agreed, and some discussions took place. However, Kumaratunga was never serious about peace, but merely wanted time to rebuild the Sri Lankan army for a new war, which broke out in April 1995.⁸

In February 2002 a ceasefire agreement was signed between the LTTE and the United National Party government of Ranil Wickremesinghe. This was the longest-lasting attempt to bring peace. But once again the government not only failed to offer the Tamil people a just solution that could guarantee a lasting peace; it failed even to fully implement the provisions of the ceasefire agreement — for example, those provisions requiring the Sri Lankan army to evacuate public buildings it had occupied in Tamil areas, and to disarm pro-government paramilitary groups. These paramilitary groups continued to exist and to carry out, in collusion with the Sri Lankan Army (SLA), acts of violence and intimidation against LTTE supporters.

The UNP government, which claimed to want peace but failed to deliver, was replaced in 2004 by a more openly chauvinist government, a coalition of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party with the JVP (Peoples Liberation Front). Later the JVP left the ruling coalition, but an even more extreme Sinhalese chauvinist party, the Jatika Hela Urumaya which is led by Buddhist monks, joined the government.

War resumes

Following the election of the SLFP, violence escalated into full-scale war. LTTE-controlled areas were subjected to aerial and artillery bombardment by the Sri Lankan armed forces, as well as blockades preventing food supplies and other necessities from entering these areas. Tamil civilians were murdered by government troops and pro-government militias, and Tamil youth were conscripted into such militias against their will.

There was a series of massacres by the armed forces. For example, on June 17, 2006 in the fishing village of Pesalai, Sri Lankan Navy troops threw grenades into a church where Tamil refugees were sheltering.⁹ On August 4 in the town of Muttur, 17 aid workers (most of them Tamils) employed by the French charity Action Contre le Faim (Action Against Hunger) were murdered in cold blood by the SLA.¹⁰ On August 14 in Mullaitivu, an orphanage was bombed by the Sri Lankan air force, killing more than 50 children.¹¹

Fifteen thousand people fled from the town of Vaharai in eastern Sri Lanka following heavy shelling by the Sri Lankan army on January 18, 2007. According to the *Tamilnet* website, the shelling was intensified in the evening despite an urgent message sent to the International Committee of the Red Cross from Vaharai hospital authorities saying that the area around the hospital, where many displaced people had sought refuge, was under attack.¹²

In March 2007, Batticaloa district parliamentarian S. Jeyanandamoorthy claimed that 40,000 people had been displaced from the Paduvankarai area of eastern Sri Lanka in a period of 48 hours, due to heavy artillery and multi-barrel rocket launcher fire from the Sri Lankan Army.¹³

On January 2, 2008 the Sri Lankan government formally renounced the cease fire agreement. But by that time the cease fire already existed only on paper. Violence, which had been escalating for several years, had by then reached the level of full-scale war.

Repression in Colombo

Repression against Tamils intensified, not only in the traditional Tamil areas of the north and east, but also in Sri Lanka's capital Colombo. Many Tamils fled to Colombo, both to escape the fighting in the north and east and for economic reasons. But the renewed war led to increased harassment of Tamils in Colombo. Police carried out sweeps through Colombo suburbs, questioning Tamils about their reasons for being in the capital. Military checkpoints were established at key junctions throughout the city. Murders, arrests and "disappearances" of Tamils by the police and army increased.

Government supporters sometimes claim that the existence of a large Tamil population in Colombo shows the lack of racism in the south, and hence the lack of need for an independent Tamil homeland. In reality it reflects the fact that war and economic underdevelopment have forced many Tamils to leave their homes in the north and east.

Sometimes the government shows its racism in a particularly blatant way. On June 7, 2007 500 Tamils were forcefully expelled from lodges in Colombo, and sent on buses to the north and east. A further 300 were detained in a police station awaiting transport.

Human rights and peace groups and Tamil and left parties held a demonstration to protest against the expulsions on June 8, 2007. The Supreme Court ordered a halt to the expulsions.

Indian Journalist Narayan Swamy commented that the expulsions carried out by the Sinhala-chauvinist state paradoxically prove the existence of, and the need for, a

Tamil homeland:

For too long it has been claimed by Sri Lanka's ruling elite that there cannot be a concept of "Tamil homeland" because more Tamils now live outside of the war zone that is the northeastern province, which was once overwhelmingly Tamil ...

On Thursday, the Sri Lanka police's high-handed action seemed to prove that the "Tamil homeland" does exist and it does constitute precisely that region the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) wants to secede.

Citing security reasons, some 500 Tamils staying in the many small lodges in Colombo's predominantly Tamil areas were ordered to pack up their bags — never mind why they were in the city — and get into buses that took them to Vavuniya in Sri Lanka's north and Batticaloa in the east.

Vavuniya and Batticaloa are among the major towns in the island's northeast, which the Tamils describe as the "Tamil homeland".¹⁴

Government military advances

During 2007 the Sri Lankan Army carried out an offensive to capture the LTTE-controlled areas in the eastern part of the island of Sri Lanka. During 2008 the SLA attempted to capture the LTTE-controlled areas in the north of the island.

Initially the SLA made slow progress in capturing territory in the north, meeting fierce resistance. In the month of August 2008 alone, 155 SLA soldiers were killed and 983 wounded.¹⁵ While forced to retreat in some areas, the LTTE carried out attacks behind SLA lines. On September 9, the LTTE carried out an attack on the SLA military headquarters for the Vanni district, killing 14 soldiers and causing severe damage.¹⁶ In the east, supposedly under firm government control, ambushes and attacks on SLA bases continued to occur.

The LTTE used light aircraft to carry out bombing raids on government targets, including an air base and oil installations in Colombo, and a military base in the northern Jaffna peninsula.

After the LTTE attack on the Sri Lankan military's Vanni district headquarters in the town of Vavuniya, the UNP opposition questioned the government's claims of progress in the war. According to UNP parliamentarian Lakshman Seneviratne, "The Air Force base and the Police HQ of Vavuniya was attacked using heavy artillery. [The] Radar defence system is completely destroyed. This happened in an area that [the] government has always claimed has been liberated long ago, and cleared of any LTTE activity".¹⁷

Seneviratne also accused government ministers of embezzling large quantities of money intended for the military.

But by 2009 the tide had turned decisively in the government's favour. In January 2, 2009 the government captured Kilinochchi, which had been the administrative centre for LTTE-controlled areas. This followed five months of aerial and ground artillery bombardment. United Nations agencies and international aid organisations had withdrawn from the town, despite attempts by the local people to block their departure (their presence had been seen as providing some deterrent to massive bombardment or other atrocities by the Sri Lankan army, which had been slowly advancing towards the town). Kilinochchi's population was evacuated to LTTE-controlled rural areas, but these areas also came under attack.

After the fall of Kilinochchi, the government made rapid progress in capturing LTTE-controlled territory. It pushed the LTTE back into a narrow coastal strip, which was bombed from land, sea and air. By May 19 the fighting was over. Prabhakaran was dead.¹⁸

Why did the Tigers lose after such a long, and at times apparently successful, struggle? It was due to a combination of three factors: the extent of support for the Sri Lankan government from foreign governments; the lack of a strong anti-war movement in the south of Sri Lanka; and some major political errors by the LTTE.

Role of imperialist powers & other countries

The United States and other imperialist powers have always supported the Sri Lankan state against the Tamil struggle. They have supplied weapons and military training to the SLA.

During the 1980s, according to Anton Balasingham:

(T)he US operated in coordination with Israel and channelled military and technical assistance to Sri Lanka through the Jewish state. An Israeli "Interest Section" was opened in the American embassy in Colombo. Israel began to build up the Sri Lanka naval capacity and brought in intelligence agents from the Internal Security Service (Shinbet) to train the Sri Lankan armed forces and especially the Special Task Force (STF) in counter-insurgency warfare. In the meantime, the US expanded the Voice of America relay station with electronic intelligence facilities in Chilaw, north of the capital Colombo.¹⁹

At that time there were indications that the US wanted to establish a naval base in Trincomalee in eastern Sri Lanka. This did not go ahead, perhaps because of Indian objections, or perhaps because, being situated in an area where the LTTE was very active, the base would have been a tempting target for guerrilla attacks.

The Israelis advised and assisted the Sri Lankan government in its policy of creating Sinhalese settlements in Tamil areas (no doubt using their experience in creating

Jewish settlements in Palestinian areas).

More recently Israel has supplied Kfir jets to the Sri Lankan air force, which used them to bomb Tamil areas including towns such as Kilinochchi.

The United States banned the LTTE as a “terrorist organisation” in 1997 (while ignoring the campaign of state terrorism carried out by the Sri Lankan armed forces, except for an occasional mild criticism of some human rights violations). Subsequently the European Union also banned the LTTE.

The bias of the “international community” has also taken more subtle forms. An example is the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission, which was established to supervise the 2002 ceasefire. The SLMM, which was headed by a Norwegian general, failed to enforce certain key provisions of the ceasefire agreement - for example, those requiring the Sri Lankan army to vacate public buildings it had occupied in Tamil areas and to disarm paramilitary groups allied to the army. The Norwegian mediators also did not take seriously the LTTE’s call for refugees to be allowed to return to their homes in the large areas of land occupied by the Sri Lankan army (the so-called “high security zones”).

But while essentially supporting the Sri Lankan government, the imperialist powers at times tried to pressure it into granting some concessions to the Tamils, in the hope of winning them away from the LTTE. Western governments sometimes criticised the Sri Lankan government for some of its human rights violations. In part this was a response to pressure from the Tamil diaspora in Western countries.

In December 2007 the US Senate imposed restrictions on the sale of military equipment to Sri Lanka, though equipment for the purpose of “maritime and air surveillance and communications” was excluded from the ban.²⁰

Given that surveillance and communications equipment was the most important form of US aid being supplied to the Sri Lankan government at that time, this was not a very harsh sanction.

Nevertheless, such criticisms and pressures annoyed the government and other Sinhala chauvinists, who often claimed that foreign powers were supporting the LTTE.

That was nonsense. The partial restrictions on military supplies to Sri Lanka were a small exception to the longstanding US policy of full support to the Sri Lankan government’s war effort. As Gajan Raj says in the May 23, 2007 *Tamil Guardian*: “[T]he US failed to restrain the Sri Lankan state’s belligerence and instead tolerated and encouraged it. Whilst making the odd statement that there was ‘no military solution to conflict’, the US provided increased military and financial assistance to the state even when Colombo was stepping up military violence in breach of the ceasefire agreement”.²¹

US officials have made their position very clear. In November 2006, US Under-Secretary of State Nicholas Burns said: “[W]e are not neutral ... We support the [Sri Lankan] government ... We believe the government has a right to try to protect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country.”²²

A very important form of US aid to the Sri Lankan government was satellite surveillance information, which enabled the Sri Lankan navy to sink boats bringing supplies to the LTTE.²³

US bases in Australia play a key role in communicating with US satellites, so it can be assumed that these bases were involved in the Sri Lankan government’s war against the Tamil independence fighters.

Nevertheless, the Sri Lankan government has not relied solely on the US and its allies for support. It has bought weapons from a range of sources, including China, India, Pakistan, and Russia.

In March 2007 Sri Lanka reached an agreement with China for the construction of a port at Hambantota on Sri Lanka’s south coast. The port, being built at the cost of \$1 billion, will be used by the Chinese navy for refuelling and docking. In return for access to the port, which lies on the trade route between China and the Middle East, China has stepped up its aid, arms supplies and diplomatic support to the Sri Lankan government. Iran, which exports oil to China via this route, has also given aid to Sri Lanka.

Failures of the left

The government’s ability to wage war on the Tamils was facilitated by the lack of a strong anti-war movement amongst the mainly Sinhalese population in the south of Sri Lanka. This in turn reflects the weakness and political inadequacy of the left in Sri Lanka.

During the 1950s the Sri Lankan left appeared fairly strong. Both the Communist Party and the Trotskyist LSSP had a number of members of parliament.

However the left parties largely neglected the rural poor. Worse still, these parties proved willing to sell out their principles in order to be able to join coalition governments with the bourgeois Sri Lanka Freedom Party. For example they dropped their insistence on equality for the Tamil language.

As junior partners in capitalist governments led by the SLFP, they shared responsibility for both the economic failures of these governments and the political repression they have carried out.²⁴

The sellouts by the LSSP and CP led to some members of these parties splitting away and forming new groups, such as the NSSP (New Socialist Party). However these

remained small and fragmented. They carried out some protests against the war and attacks on civil liberties, but were unable to win the mass of the workers and peasants away from the chauvinism promoted by the government.

The shortcomings of the left parties contributed to the rise of the JVP in Sinhala areas and of the LTTE in Tamil areas.

The JVP

The JVP (Peoples Liberation Front) was formed in the 1960s as a radical movement of Sinhalese rural youth. It led revolts against the government in 1971 and 1989 and was repressed by the SLA with extreme brutality on both occasions.

The 1971 uprising was a response to the repression carried out by the SLFP-led government when the JVP criticised the government's failure to resolve the problems of the poor. The 1989 uprising was a response to the India-Sri Lanka accord, which allowed Indian troops to enter Sri Lanka. This second uprising was nationalist and implicitly racist in its political character.²⁵

Subsequently the JVP was rebuilt and for a time had considerable success in parliamentary elections. Previously critical of the parliamentarist attitude of the old left parties, the JVP seems to have adapted to parliamentarism itself. In 2005 it reassured US officials that it had "renounced armed struggle".²⁶

The JVP, while claiming to be Marxist, always had an element of Sinhalese chauvinism in its outlook. This has become more pronounced in recent years.

While claiming to support equal rights for all ethnic groups, it denied the right of Tamils to self-determination and was strident in calling for war against the LTTE — which in practice, given the racist character of the Sri Lankan army and the extent of popular support for the LTTE amongst Tamils, meant war against the Tamil people.

The JVP, disregarding the tens of thousands of its own members and supporters massacred by the Sri Lankan Army in 1971 and 1989, now talks of the SLA as "our armed forces".²⁷ In August 2006 Wimal Weerawansa, who was at that time the JVP's Propaganda Secretary, was invited to address SLA troops, and advocated full scale war against the LTTE.²⁸

Shortly afterwards Weerawansa and some of the most extreme warmongers split from the JVP to form the National Freedom Front. However the JVP remained pro-war.

In 2011 there was another split in the JVP. This time it was a left-wing group that split away. The new group adopted the name Frontline Socialist Party. It said that the JVP had been wrong to support the war, and it called for ending the military occupation of Tamil areas. However it still rejects the right of self-determination. We will have to

see how this apparent contradiction is resolved in practice.

Strengths & limitations of the LTTE

The LTTE was formed by young people angry at the oppression of Tamils and disillusioned with peaceful methods of struggle, which had not succeeded. They were also disillusioned by the sellouts of the main left parties, and didn't see any prospect of an alliance with the Sinhala workers and peasants against the Sinhalese ruling class.

This led them to focus on the military struggle. They succeeded in building a formidable fighting force, able to inflict major defeats on the Sri Lankan army.

But a one-sided emphasis on military struggle has led to mistakes, including the alienation of potential allies.

The LTTE fought courageously and persistently against the Sri Lankan and Indian armies in an effort to win self-determination for the Tamil people. It was also willing to seek a peaceful solution when it appeared that the Sri Lankan government might be willing to agree.

The LTTE won strong support from the Tamils living in the north and east of the island of Sri Lanka. This is indicated by election results (20 members of the pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance were elected to Sri Lanka's parliament in 2004), and by the big attendance at LTTE-organised rallies held during the ceasefire (e.g., the series of large rallies for self-determination held throughout the north and east during 2005).

Yet the goal of self-determination was not attained. The LTTE was defeated. The goal of a Tamil homeland seems a long way off.

This was not solely due to the military power of the Sri Lankan state and the backing it receives from the imperialist powers (important though that was). It was also due to the political limitations of the LTTE itself.

The LTTE usually tended to see the struggle as a predominantly military one. This led it to disregard certain essential political tasks, including the need to win support amongst the Sinhalese workers, peasants and students of southern Sri Lanka for the right of Tamils to self-determination, as well as the need to win the support of the Tamil-speaking Muslims of eastern Sri Lanka.

The US anti-war movement played a key role in forcing the withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam. The absence of a mass anti-war movement in southern Sri Lanka was a key obstacle to the success of the Tamil self-determination struggle.

The LTTE was willing to negotiate with Sinhalese political leaders whenever the latter showed any signs of wanting to reach a peaceful solution. But the LTTE did not make a serious effort to get its message directly to the Sinhalese masses, bypassing the politicians whose promises of peace have been deceptive.

The lack of a strong anti-war movement in southern Sri Lanka reflects the weakness and political limitations of the Sri Lankan left. But some actions by LTTE have also helped to alienate the Sinhalese masses.

The LTTE has sometimes responded to the atrocities of the SLA by carrying out atrocities of its own, including massacres of Sinhalese civilians. For example, in May 1985, in reprisal for the murder of 70 Tamil civilians by the SLA at Valvettiturai, a few LTTE members drove to the Sinhala town of Anuradhapura and gunned down 150 people.²⁹

The LTTE at various times carried out bombing campaigns in Sri Lanka's capital Colombo and elsewhere in the south. These actions helped alienate the Sinhalese workers from the Tamil struggle. When the targets were military such attacks could be justified, but this was not always the case.

Errors by the LTTE also helped alienate the Tamil-speaking Muslims of northern and eastern Sri Lanka from the Tamil struggle.

The government's discrimination against the Tamil language should have provided a basis for a united struggle by all Tamil-speaking people, including Muslims, against this injustice, and for a united homeland for all Tamil-speaking people in the north and east of Sri Lanka.

Some Muslim youth joined the LTTE in its early years. But the government, with the aid of some Muslim politicians, was able to instigate clashes between Tamils and Muslims. This led the LTTE to become suspicious of Muslims, to such an extent that it expelled them en masse from the Jaffna region.

The LTTE subsequently made efforts to rebuild relations with the Muslims. It had some success, particularly following the ceasefire period. Jan Nayagam, writing in the *Tamil Guardian* in December 2005, said:

The worst inter-communal animosity existed in the early to mid-nineties. The state created armed Muslim paramilitary groups which it utilised to fuel communal violence and open a third front in the bloody war. The LTTE's counter-violence led to a spiral which devastated the fabric of communal relations. In a particular low point of communal relations, the LTTE expelled several thousand Muslims from Jaffna. The movement has since apologised for this infamous action and urged Muslims to resettle without fear ...

A close examination of the conduct of the LTTE and its associated organisations since the February 2002 ceasefire reveals a sustained effort in this regard to rebuild bridges with the Muslim community.

The most revealing — and undeniably most important — aspect is the LTTE's response to outbreaks of communal violence. Senior LTTE political wing officials

meet promptly with Muslim community and religious leaders to discuss and resolve the issue and to jointly urge restraint on all sides ...

On a wider note, Tamil charitable organisations such as the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation also engage in projects in predominantly Muslim areas ...

The most promising sign of improving inter-communal relations between Tamils and Muslims and in particular, the LTTE and Muslims, was the Centre for Policy Alternatives' survey last week which suggested that over 50% of Muslim respondents to their poll backed the establishment of the LTTE's Interim Self-Governing Administration in the North-East.³⁰

However, the suspicions of Muslims towards the LTTE were never completely overcome. Past mistakes and crimes were not easily forgiven. Most Muslims continued to vote for politicians hostile to the LTTE. But they didn't like the Sinhala chauvinist government either. Most appeared distrustful of both the government and the LTTE.

The LTTE's militaristic way of thinking also led to the repression of dissent among the Tamils themselves.

During the period of Indian intervention the Indian government tried to make use of the rivalries amongst Tamil militant groups by building up other groups as a counter to the LTTE. The Tigers reacted ruthlessly by killing hundreds of members of rival groups.³¹

Non-violent political opponents and critics of the LTTE were also subject to repression, including murder.

Thus in fighting against a ruthless enemy — the Sri Lankan state — the LTTE also acted in a ruthless manner that alienated potential allies.

However, we should be clear that the main blame for the violence lies with the Sri Lankan government. The cycle of violence was initiated by the government: the militaristic mentality of the Tamil youth who formed the LTTE was a response (albeit a mistaken one) to the violent repression carried out by the government and Sinhalese chauvinists.

The current situation

Today the Tamil areas in the north and east of the island of Sri Lanka are under military occupation. New military bases have been established, despite the end of the fighting.

Sinhalese settlements are expanding, in a similar way to the Jewish settlements in the West Bank. The *Tamilnet* website has accused the Sri Lankan government of waging a "colonisation war" against the Tamil people.³² Just as Israel uses Jewish settlements to break up the areas inhabited by Palestinians into small fragments,

thereby trying to make a Palestinian state impossible, Sri Lanka is using Sinhalese settlements to break up the Tamil areas with the intention of making a Tamil state impossible.

Land is also being given to foreign capitalists.

Most of the 300,000 Tamils held in detention camps in May 2009 have now been released. However, many displaced Tamils are unable to return to their homes and farms, because the land is occupied by military bases or Sinhalese settlements.

There are still thousands of Tamil political prisoners. Female prisoners have been systematically raped. Even after being released they are often summoned to army camps and raped again.³³

Murders and disappearances are regular occurrences. Hindu temples have been destroyed or damaged by the army or by Sinhalese settlers.

The situation for Tamils is extremely grim. Repression in the Tamil areas is very intense. Nevertheless, resistance is occurring. For example, there have been some protests by people demanding the right to return to their homes and farms in areas under military occupation.³⁴

There have also been protests by Tamils in the diaspora. For example, Tamils in Britain recently protested at the visit of Sri Lankan president Mahinda Rajapaksa for the Queen's jubilee celebrations.

Debate at the UN

The Sri Lankan government has at times sought to win the sympathy of third world people and governments by portraying itself as a victim of imperialist plots to “divide the country”. Any criticism of Sri Lanka's human rights record by Western NGOs or the Western media is portrayed as “outside interference”.

Such claims are ridiculous given the aid Sri Lanka has received from the US, Israel, the European Union, etc, and the hostility of the Western media and NGOs to the “terrorist” LTTE. Nevertheless Sri Lanka has sometimes been able to win support from third world countries in international forums based in part on such spurious “anti-imperialism”.

In May 2009 there was a discussion on Sri Lanka in the United Nations Human Rights Council. Most Western governments supported a Swiss resolution which condemned the LTTE, but also called on the Sri Lankan government to “investigate” allegations of human rights abuses and prosecute those responsible. Given that the government was the main abuser of human rights in Sri Lanka, this amounted to a call for the government to investigate itself.

This was a toothless resolution. Nevertheless the Sri Lankan government objected

to the implication that it may have committed human rights abuses. Most third world countries voted against this resolution and in favour of another resolution on “assistance to Sri Lanka in the promotion and protection of human rights” that condemned the LTTE and made no mention of government atrocities.

Unfortunately the left-wing governments of Cuba and Bolivia supported the Sri Lankan government in this debate.

Sri Lankan diplomats give contradictory messages to different audiences. The Sri Lankan ambassador to Cuba sounds very different to the ambassadors to imperialist countries. Sri Lanka’s duplicity was exposed when its ambassador to Israel expressed anti-Palestinian views.³⁵

More recently Sri Lanka has been less successful in its diplomacy. In 2010 the UN Secretary-general Ban Ki-moon established a three-person panel to investigate war crimes in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan government tried to block this but was unsuccessful. Sri Lanka failed to get the Non-Aligned Movement to issue a statement opposing the panel. This may indicate that Sri Lanka’s fake “anti-imperialism” was being received with more scepticism.

The UN panel found “credible allegations, which if proven, indicate that a wide range of serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law was committed by both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE, some of which would amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity”.

LLRC

To avoid the possibility of international war crimes investigations, the Sri Lankan government set up its own enquiry, the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission. This predictably absolved the Sri Lankan government of blame for war crimes. Nevertheless it did make some recommendations for improving the situation of the Tamils, such as the resettlement of displaced people on their own land, and ending army control of civil affairs in Tamil areas. These recommendations have not been acted on.

Some Tamils reject that LLRC report outright, while others are demanding the implementation of some of its recommendations that they consider positive.

Self-determination

Racism and repression led Tamils to seek an independent Tamil state. The independence struggle was crushed, and racism and repression continue.

The government claims that “peace” has been restored. But peace without justice is not a real and lasting peace.

Tamils on the island of Sri Lanka can not freely express their views. But Tamils in the diaspora reaffirmed their support for self-determination in an international referendum held in 2010.

The *Tamilnet* website has advocated a UN-supervised referendum to determine the wishes of the Tamil people.³⁶ Such a referendum would give Tamils the opportunity to choose between the options of an independent Tamil Eelam; a unitary Sri Lanka; or some other alternative (such as federalism).

The government talks of the “unity” of Sri Lanka, but its policies have divided people on ethnic lines. Real unity must be voluntary. It can not be imposed by the SLA through violent repression of the Tamil people.

Following the government’s military victory, self-determination is a long way off. Solidarity activists will also have to campaign around immediate demands such as the removal of army bases from Tamil areas; the return of land to its Tamil owners; and freedom for political prisoners. ■

Notes

1. *The Sunday Age*, April 26, 2009.
2. *Tamilnet* (www.tamilnet.com), May 10, 2009).
3. Gordon Weiss, *The Cage* (Picador: Sydney, 2011), p. 194.
4. Weiss, p. 129.
5. Report quoted in the May 9 edition of Sri Lanka’s *Daily Mirror* newspaper (www.dailymirror.lk).
6. *The Sunday Leader*, January 11, 2009 (www.thesundayleader.lk/20090111/editorial-.htm).
7. Anton Balasingham, *War and Peace: Armed Struggle and Peace Efforts of Liberation Tigers* (Fairmax Publishing: Mitcham UK, 2004), p. 9.
8. LTTE theoretician and negotiator Anton Balasingham documents this in chapter 4 of his book (see above), where he publishes the series of letters exchanged between Kumaratunga and LTTE leader Vellupillai Pirapaharan.
9. *The Age*, June 19, 2006.
10. *Tamilnet*, August 8, 2006.
11. *Tamilnet*, August 14, 2006.
12. *Tamilnet*, January 19, 2007.
13. *Tamilnet*, March 9, 2007.
14. M.R.Narayan Swamy, “How to tell Tamils they don’t belong in Sri Lanka”, www.newkerala.com.
15. Statement by Sri Lankan prime minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake (cited by *Tamilnet*, September 9, 2008).
16. Figure of 14 military personnel killed, 29 wounded, plus “several policemen” killed, given by UNP parliamentarian Lakshman Seneviratne (cited by *Tamilnet*, September 10, 2008).
17. Lakshman Seneviratne, see note above.
18. The exact circumstances of Prabakaran’s death are unknown. Pictures of his body were shown on TV, but his body was then burnt without inquest or postmortem.
19. Balasingham, p. 49.
20. *Tamilnet*, January 3, 2008.

21. Gajan Raj, *Tamil Guardian*, May 23, 2007.
 22. Nicholas Burns, cited by Gajan Raj, *Tamil Guardian*, May 23, 2007.
 23. Jon Lee Anderson, *New Yorker*, January 17, 2011, p. 48.
 24. The degeneration of the LSSP is documented in *Revolutionary Marxism vs. Class Collaboration in Sri Lanka*, published by the United States Socialist Workers Party as part of its Education for Socialists series. The LSSP first joined a coalition government with the SLFP in 1964-65, and did so again in 1970. They shared responsibility for the repression of the JVP in 1971.
 25. For more information on the JVP, see *Rebellion, Repression and the Struggle for Justice in Sri Lanka: the Lionel Bopage Story* by Michael Colin Cooke (Agahas Publishers: Colombo, 2011).
 26. See the article "Thank You US", in the JVP magazine *Red Power*, March-April 2005.
 27. As above.
 28. *Sunday Leader* [Sri Lanka], August 20, 2006; see also *Tamilnet*, August 25, 2006.
 29. See *The Broken Palmyra* by Rajan Hoole et al (The Sri Lanka Studies Institute: Claremont, CA, 1990), chapter 5 (www.uthr.org/BP).
 30. *Tamil Guardian*, December 21, 2005.
 31. Violence within and between the Tamil armed groups began fairly early in the armed struggle. (See *The Broken Palmyra*, chapter 5). It became worse after they began receiving Indian aid. Balasingham (pp. 83-84) claims that RAW viewed the LTTE, which was the strongest of the Tamil armed groups, as the most difficult to control.
- Three other organisations began receiving Indian aid as early as August 1983, with the LTTE initially being excluded (Balasingham, pp. 54-56). It appears that RAW wanted to strengthen the other organisations as a counterweight to the LTTE. While the LTTE soon began receiving aid too, this was accompanied by pressure to abandon its commitment to an independent Tamil state.
- In 1986 the LTTE launched violent attacks on two of the other Tamil groups, TELO and the EPRLF. With its rivals eliminated, the LTTE was the only remaining Tamil armed group operating inside Sri Lanka, and the Indian government had no choice but to try to get its cooperation. Both persuasion and various forms of pressure were used in an attempt to get the LTTE to accept the Indian plan for limited autonomy. Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi secretly offered the LTTE a leading role in a proposed interim administration for northeastern Sri Lanka. (Balasingham, pp. 107-8).
- In August 1987 an agreement was signed between the Indian and Sri Lankan governments. Indian troops entered Sri Lanka as "peacekeepers". But clashes soon occurred between the Indian troops and the LTTE. Members of some other Tamil groups were brought into Sri Lanka from India, and helped the Indians to run the local administration and to fight the LTTE.
32. *Tamilnet*, February 9, 2001.
 33. *Tamilnet*, August 30, 2012.
 34. *Tamilnet*, June 19, 2012.
 35. See <http://links.org.au/node/1841>.
 36. See *Tamilnet*, June 16, 2012.

Sri Lanka: Genocide of the Tamil Minority

Brian Senewiratne

There is a humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka, where the Tamil minority in the island's north and east are facing annihilation at the hands of the Sinhalese-dominated government.

This article will deal with the current crisis. The more fundamental problem of the legacy left by colonial British rule (1796-1948) will be dealt with in later articles. These colonial administrative structures will need to be reversed if there is ever to be peace or prosperity in Sri Lanka.

I am a Sinhalese, from the majority community, not from the brutalised Tamil minority. I quit Sri Lanka in 1976.

Who runs that country is of no concern to me, as long as it is run without serious violations of human rights. Sri Lanka was tossed out of the UN Human Rights Council in May last year due to its human rights record, and the drift of a democracy to a fascist politico-military dictatorship, none of which have been publicised internationally.

Current problem

The ethno-religious mix of Sri Lanka, with 20 million people, consists of ethnic Sinhalese (74%), Tamils (18%) in two groups (ethnic Tamils, 12.5%, and the plantation, or Indian, Tamils, 5.5%) and Moors (6.5%).

The ethnic Sinhalese and the ethnic Tamils have been in the country for at least 2500 years — the Tamils for probably much longer, given the proximity of Sri Lanka to south India from where the ethnic Tamils came.

Green Left Weekly, #780, January 28, 2009. *Brian Senewiratne* is a member of the Socialist Alliance in Brisbane. Many of his articles on the Tamil question can be found at <http://www.tamilcanadian.com>.

The plantation Tamils are descendants of indentured labourers brought to the country by the British in the mid-1850s to work in the tea plantations in the central hills. The Moors are descendants of Arab traders from the 13th-15th century.

The ethnic conflict is between the Sinhalese-dominated government and the ethnic Tamils. The Sinhalese speak an Indo-aryan language, Sinhalese, while the Tamils a Dravidian language, Tamil. The Moors are mainly Tamil-speaking but many are bilingual.

To add a religious dimension to an already existing ethno-linguistic one, the Sinhalese are Buddhist (70%) and the Tamils are Hindus. About 7% of each group have been converted to Christianity by Westerners. The Moors are mostly Muslims.

Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic, multireligious, multilingual and multicultural country. Despite this, the Sinhala-Buddhist majority claim that Sri Lanka is a Sinhala-Buddhist country.

The main proponents of this ethno-religious chauvinism are, firstly, the Buddhist monks who claim that Buddha on his death bed nominated Sri Lanka to be the custodian of his teaching, and secondly Sinhalese politicians across the entire political spectrum who have done so to gain the political support of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority to get into or remain in power.

The major Sinhalese political parties have competed with each other to discriminate against the Tamils in language, education and employment with the clear intention of getting the Sinhalese vote.

A third proponent is the Sinhalese-dominated Sri Lankan Armed Forces (99% Sinhalese). The head of the SLA stated in an interview in September last year: “I strongly believe that this country belongs to the Sinhalese ...”

The real danger is that while the ethno-religious bigots among the Buddhist clergy and the Sinhalese political opportunists are not in a position to deliver an exclusively Sinhala-Buddhist nation, the SLA — equipped and supported by countries such as the US, China, India, Pakistan, Britain and Israel, for their own geopolitical/economic gains — do have that capacity.

If this means committing genocide against the Tamil people, the politico-military junta, which has the temerity to call itself the “Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka”, is more than willing to do so.

Problem of ethnic cleansing

There are four options to achieve an exclusively Sinhala-Buddhist Sri Lanka.

- Drive them out of the country. Although 1.3 million have already been driven out, there are still 2 million left.

- Make them “non-people”, i.e., internal refugees. Currently, there are 500,000 Tamil civilians living in refugee camps in the Tamil north and east or have fled into the jungles in the north to escape SLA bombing. There are also 200,000 Tamil refugees in south India.

On November 19, Amnesty International USA, in a publication titled *Sri Lanka government must act now to protect 300,000 displaced persons*, stated: “In September 2008, the Sri Lankan government ordered the United Nations (UN) and non-government aid-workers to leave the region (the Tamil north). The government then assumed total responsibility for ensuring the needs of the civilian population affected by the hostilities are met.”

On December 23, the US-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) came out with a detailed 49-page report entitled *Besieged, Displaced, and Detained: The Plight of Civilians in Sri Lanka’s Vanni Region*. This 49-page report documents the Sri Lankan government’s responsibility for the plight of the 230,000 to 300,000 displaced people in the Vanni (northern) conflict zone.

It documents that thousands of Tamils fleeing the fighting in the north are trapped by the government and are being denied basic provisions.

Brad Adams, HRW Asia Director, one of the people who wrote this report, said: “To add insult to injury, people who manage to flee the fighting end up being held indefinitely in army-run prison camps.”

He went on to make the situation abundantly clear: “The government’s ‘welfare centres’ for civilians fleeing the Vanni are just badly disguised prisons.”

- Make them “disappear”. Today, Sri Lanka leads the world in “involuntary disappearances”.

On November 24, HRW published a report entitled *Sri Lanka: Human Rights Situation Deteriorating in the East* in which Adams stated: “The Sri Lankan government says that the ‘liberated’ East is an example of democracy in action and a model for areas recaptured from the LTTE. But killings and abductions are rife, and there is total impunity for horrific acts.”

- Kill them — i.e. commit genocide. “Genocide” is defined by the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide as “an act committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group”.

Genocide has nothing to do with numbers killed, it is the intention and the act(s) to achieve this intention that defines it.

Bombing, shelling and shooting are not the only ways to kill. One could starve them, withhold essential medicines, prevent survival activity (e.g. fishing and

agriculture), destroy businesses, markets, homes, hospitals and schools. Once the intention is there, the ways to achieve genocide are endless.

There are also different types of genocide. I have called these, “educational genocide”, “cultural genocide”, “economic genocide” and “religious genocide” — defined as the intention, backed by the act, of destroying in whole or part the education, culture or economy and religion of an ethnic group.

The Sri Lankan government is guilty of all of these. ■

Sri Lanka: A War on Tamils

Brian Senewiratne

The “war” that is going on in Sri Lanka is a liberation struggle of the Tamil people for their right to self-determination, which would enable them to exist with equality, dignity and safety in the area of historical habitation of the Tamil people — the north and the east of Sri Lanka.

This war could not continue without foreign aid going to the Sri Lankan government. Without this aid, Sri Lanka would be forced to the negotiating table. Imperialism today takes the form of foreign aid.

Resistance

No discussion of what is going on in Sri Lanka is complete without a comment on the question of suicide bombings and child soldiers, issues used to demonise Tamil resistance to the Sri Lankan regime.

Suicide bombings have been a hallmark of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in its decades-long armed struggle against the Sri Lankan state. The latter has used and promoted extreme violence in its attempt to enforce Sinhalese (the majority ethnic group) domination on the island.

I will quote the Booker prize-winning Indian author Arundhati Roy in her book *The Ordinary Persons Guide to Empire*. Substitute Sri Lanka for Israel and Tamil for Palestinian.

Young Palestinians who cannot contain their anger turn themselves into human bombs and haunt Israel’s streets, blowing themselves up, killing ordinary people.

Suicide bombing is an act of individual despair, not a revolutionary tactic.

The world is called upon to condemn suicide bombers, but can we ignore the long road they have journeyed on before they arrived at their destination?

The psychology of the suicide bomber is: “You shot my father, raped and killed my

mother, hanged my brother, tortured and killed my sister. I have nothing left. When I decide to leave this planet, I will take you with me.”

Also, the LTTE has, for years, recruited children as fighters. What is new is that there are several recent reports that the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) is doing the same thing.

Allan Rock is a Canadian diplomat working with the United Nations sent to Sri Lanka in 2006, who issued a report that confirmed that the LTTE was recruiting child soldiers.

He also stated that Tamil paramilitary groups working with the SLA were doing the same thing, conscripting child soldiers in the eastern province.

A December 2 report by the US-based Human Rights Watch stated that the leaders of the Tamil paramilitary groups working with the Sri Lankan regime, one of them recently appointed a member of parliament by President Mahinda Rajapaksa, “have been implicated in serious human rights abuses ... The abuses included abducting large numbers of children and forcing them to serve as soldiers ... Escapees often must go into hiding to prevent being abducted again. In some instances, their families have faced pressure to give a ‘replacement’ child soldier to the group.”

International interests

Violations of human rights can no longer be considered an “internal affair” of that country. That is why the world got involved in the issue of apartheid in South Africa, (indisputably an “internal affair” of that country).

Sri Lanka cannot say it is not our business. It is.

These “internal affairs” cause refugees that seek safe havens in other countries such as Australia. Tamil civilians brutalised by the Sri Lankan regime contact “people smugglers”, are put into leaking boats that sink off the Australian coast, or arrive here to be locked up as criminals.

Rather than creating inhumane ways of dealing with these people, the source of the problem, the human rights violations in Sri Lanka, must be addressed.

What is more, all conflicts come to an end. The conflict in East Timor did come to an end, as has the conflict in Ireland and so many others. The Sri Lankan conflict will come to an end in five years, 10, or longer. It might do so with Sri Lanka reduced to a shell, as East Timor was.

The rebuilding of Sri Lanka when the conflict is over will fall on the “international community” (as it did with East Timor). To prevent this catastrophe, action must be taken.

It is not appreciated that there are two conflicts in Sri Lanka.

Firstly, between the Sri Lankan regime and the Tamil people to force the Tamil people to accept Sri Lanka as a Sinhala-Buddhist nation.

Secondly, between the US, India and China for control of the Indian Ocean.

The Indian Ocean is not the largest ocean on this planet, but by far, the busiest. Forty percent of the world's population is in countries around the Indian Ocean. Seventy percent of the world's oil shipments, and 50% of the world's container cargo, travel across this ocean.

As US admiral Alfred Mahan commented 100 years ago, "Whoever controls the Indian Ocean, dominates Asia."

This international "war" is a peculiar one. These interests compete with each other to control the Indian Ocean, and cooperate with each other to prevent a solution to the problem in Sri Lanka.

Just as oil is the problem in the Middle East, the geographical position of Sri Lanka, astride the Indian Ocean, is the problem in Sri Lanka.

The "prize" is Trincomalee, the fourth largest natural harbour in the world, in the Tamil northeast. Trincomalee remaining in the hands of a corrupt Sinhalese regime in Colombo is a better option to it falling into the hands of an independent Tamil state.

To negotiate with a corrupt regime is a far easier task than negotiating with the much more disciplined Tamils.

China has a special interest in safeguarding its crucial oil supply from the Middle East, which passes just below Sri Lanka.

India has a special interest in preventing any other power from "interfering" (even if this means solving a problem) in its "area of control".

For India to get a foothold in Sri Lanka is crucial. That would be easier to achieve with a corrupt, disorganised, despotic regime in Colombo, than with an independent Tamil state.

What has to be done

International human rights monitors must be admitted into Sri Lanka, now. Tomorrow might be too late for the Tamils.

Sri Lankan disinformation that the problem is "Tamil terrorism" must be exposed. The problem is Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-religious chauvinism and state terrorism aimed at turning Sri Lanka into a Sinhala-Buddhist nation.

I have DVDs that set this out in detail, which I have donated to the Socialist Alliance in Australia.

Sri Lanka must be isolated, as was apartheid South Africa. Economic sanctions should be imposed.

We should stop buying Sri Lankan goods. A boycott should target tourism and point to the bloodstained beaches of Sri Lanka. Trade union action to stop handling goods, to and from Sri Lanka, should be implemented.

Public protests need to be organised internationally.

We should pressure our governments to force Sri Lanka to the negotiating table and to make clear that a military “solution” to the Tamil question is not acceptable. ■

Genocide of Tamils & Atrocities in Sri Lanka While Australia Looks On

Statement by Dr Brian Senewiratne (MD, FRCP, FRACP)

I am a Sinhalese from the majority community in Sri Lanka, not from the brutalised Tamil community. I have campaigned for some five decades for the right of the Tamils to live with equality, dignity and safety in the country of their birth. I am releasing this statement as a concerned Australian (here for 32 years), and as a member of the Socialist Alliance, the only non-Tamil organisation to support the struggle of the Tamils for justice.

Last week the Sinhalese-dominated government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) succeeded in its immediate aim of ending the armed resistance of the Tamil people, who live in the North and East of the country. “Bloodbath on the beach” was how the United Nations described the battle and we are yet to see the full extent of this major humanitarian catastrophe.

The GoSL of president Mahendra Rajapaksa claims it has triumphed in a “war on terrorism”. What it has really been doing is fighting the Tamil people to force them to accept Sri Lanka as a Sinhala-Buddhist nation. It is about the alliance between religious fundamentalists and state chauvinists who together—with the backing of key Western countries—have been able to deny the Tamils their rights. According to international law expert Professor Francis Boyle of the University of Illinois, the Europeans and the United States gave the green light to Rajapaksa to go ahead and destroy the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and their homeland.

There had been progress on a negotiated settlement between the GoSL and the LTTE, and even discussion about a federal structure for Sri Lanka. But Rajapaksa

terminated the talks and the ceasefire and resumed the fighting, and now the world is witness to the dreadful consequences.

Genocide

The UN Convention defines genocide as “an act committed with intent to destroy in whole, or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group”. In Sri Lanka, this “part” are the Tamils. The GoSL is prepared to commit genocide of the Tamils, similar to Hitler’s “final solution of the Jewish question”.

It is a genocide when a war against 10% of the population over three decades culminates in the death of 10,000 people in a few months, about 100,000 in the last 32 years. It is genocide when governments try to wipe out a people’s political voice and drive half a population into the diaspora.

Sri Lanka’s Tamils are now facing genocide or internment in concentration camps that masquerade as “refugee camps”. The Tamil civilians were supposedly “liberated” from the Tamil Tigers by the GoSL. But if they are liberated people, why keep them behind barbed-wire fences, and why are international observers, including the media and humanitarian workers, still prevented from visiting these camps?

There are 154,000 Tamil civilians, some in tents, others under trees, in 24 camps, behind barbed-wire fences. The tents are for five people, but house between seven and 21. Living conditions are appalling, with deliberate starvation and the denial of adequate medical help.

The women and girls are raped by the Armed Forces, pregnant women are aborted and some even sterilised. The GoSL would deny all this. Can foreign observers check these allegations? No they may not. It is an “internal affair”. We beg to differ.

There are some 120,000 Tamil civilians left in the government “safe zone”, which has been regularly bombed by its armed forces. Even hospitals have not been spared. The defence secretary, the president’s brother, in an interview with British media, said that bombing of hospitals is “acceptable”. This contravenes the first and fourth sections of the Geneva Convention, signed and ratified by the GoSL. The GoSL expelled all humanitarian workers and agencies, including UN agencies, from the conflict zone so that genocide could be done without witnesses. This has not been done in any other country in the world.

More than 6000 Tamil civilians have been slaughtered in just the past four months. Recently, the only obstetrician in the area was gunned down by the [Sri Lankan] armed forces. Why? Genocide.

Kfir jets, bombers, multi-barrel rocket launchers and helicopter gunships have been used by the GoSL dropping, along with conventional arsenal, cluster bombs and

white phosphorus bombs. The GoSL will, of course, deny this, but the photographic evidence, including UN aerial photographs, recently leaked to the outside world, leave no doubt that these banned weapons are being used.

End Western complicity in war crimes

The foreign ministers of Britain, France and Sweden tried to get into Colombo to discuss the humanitarian disaster with the GoSL. The Swedish foreign minister could not even get a visa to enter the country. The other two returned saying that they had “tried very hard” but achieved nothing.

In the face of increasing international concern at the civilian casualties, the Tamil Tigers declared a unilateral ceasefire. The GoSL refused to reciprocate saying that the offer was a “joke”. On May 21, 2008, Sri Lanka was tossed out of the UN Human Rights Council on account of its outrageous human rights record.

However, little or none of this gets mentioned in the Australian media. Australians have a right to ask why.

The Australian government has failed to act in condemning a serious abuse of human rights by a country with which it shares an ocean.

Commercial and geopolitical considerations are clearly more important than humanitarian ones, however serious. Indeed, in giving “aid” to the Rajapaksa government in the middle of its killing spree against the Tamils, the Rudd government has been in political solidarity with the Rajapaksa’s military mission.

This is simply not acceptable, and damages the image of Australia by its failure to condemn a murderous regime and for failing to institute sanctions on Sri Lanka until the killing stops. The Australian government and the Australian media have a serious case to answer for their silence and indifference towards a horrendous genocide. This must stop. The Australian government has a duty not only to Tamil Australians, but to all those with a conscience — to make every effort to assist now. This must include:

- Demanding that the Sri Lankan government be tried before the International Criminal Court for war crimes. This was a war conducted away from any international scrutiny. This massacre was largely hidden. But there has been enough independent information to know that the Rajapaksa government has committed war crimes.
- Pressuring the Rajapaksa government to allow Tamils the right to decide where they live, including settling in Australia if they wish.
- Ending all aid and support to the Rajapaksa government while it continues its genocidal policy against Sri Lanka’s Tamil people. ■

Sri Lanka & Australia

By Chris Slee

In the three years since the defeat of the LTTE, many Tamils fleeing from Sri Lanka have sought refuge in Australia.

Australian politicians claim there is no good reason for this. After all, they say, the war is over and Sri Lanka is a democracy. Why would anyone need to flee?

In reality, the victory of the racist Sri Lankan government means that Tamils suffer under military occupation, and face murder, torture, imprisonment and rape at the hands of the Sri Lankan Army and allied paramilitary groups. For many Tamils, risking a dangerous sea voyage in often unsafe boats to reach sanctuary in Australia, would seem like a lesser evil than staying.

At the time of writing (September 2012) the Australian Labor government has already sent back one Tamil asylum seeker to Sri Lanka, and is planning to send back many more.

Some Tamils have been accepted as refugees, but are nevertheless detained indefinitely because the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation claims they are a security threat — presumably on the basis of information supplied by the Sri Lankan government.

Liberal Party shadow ministers have said that asylum seekers from Sri Lanka should be sent back without even having their claims for refugee status considered.

Such inhumanity is particularly repugnant in view of Australia's role in helping create the conditions from which the refugees are fleeing.

The Australian government has a long history of collaboration with the Sri Lankan regime.

One example was the charging of three Tamil men — Australian citizens of Sri Lankan origin — with terrorism offences in 2007.

The three men — Arumugam Rajeevan, Aruran Vinayagamoorthy and Sivarajah Yathavan — were charged with belonging to, and assisting, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, which was claimed by the prosecution to be a terrorist organisation,

even though it had never carried out any terrorist actions in Australia.

These charges were dropped in March 2010. The three received good behaviour bonds after pleading guilty to a lesser offence.

The three men, like many other Tamils in Australia and around the world, had been involved in raising money for humanitarian purposes, including relief work after the December 2004 tsunami which devastated the east coast of the island of Sri Lanka. The aid was distributed in areas controlled by the LTTE.

At the time of the tsunami, a ceasefire was in effect. Under the ceasefire agreement, signed in February 2002, the LTTE was recognised as the de facto government of significant parts of the island.

Evidence given by an Australian Federal Police officer to a committal hearing in 2007 showed that the prosecution had been commenced at the behest of the Sri Lankan government.

Lawyer Rob Stary, who defended the three men, has said he believes that one purpose of the prosecution of the three men was to destabilise and intimidate the Tamil diaspora, not only in Australia but around the world. The Sri Lankan government wanted to intimidate overseas Tamils into not supporting the LTTE's de facto state.

Stary argued that Australia had been "coopted" into the Sri Lankan government's war against the LTTE.

The Australian government's motives for supporting the Sri Lankan government include both economic and strategic reasons.

Australian capital has significant investments in Sri Lanka. For example, Ansell Pacific is the biggest employer of industrial labour in the country.

Australia is part of the imperialist alliance led by the United States. Australia supports US efforts to remain the dominant power in the world. The struggle between the US and China for influence in Sri Lanka is part of this.

The US bases in Australia play a key role in communicating with US satellites, and undoubtedly would have been involved in gathering the surveillance information that the US supplied to the Sri Lankan government. ■

Socialist Alliance policy

The Socialist Alliance recognises that Tamils are an oppressed nation within Sri Lanka, and supports their right to self-determination.

This means that Tamils should have the right to choose whether they wish to be part of a united Sri Lanka, to break away and form an independent Tamil state in their traditional homelands in the north and east of the island, or to have some intermediate form such as federalism or autonomy.

Regardless of whether Sri Lanka remains a single state or whether the Tamil areas become independent, the rights of minorities must be protected.

This includes the rights of Tamils, Muslims and other minorities in Sinhalese areas, and the rights of Muslims and Sinhalese in Tamil areas.

The Socialist Alliance calls for full political, religious and linguistic rights for such groups.

Right of Self-Determination of Ilankai Tamils

By Dr Vickramabahu Karunarathne

The right of self-determination of Tamil-speaking people is a foremost issue in modern Lankan society. Though it is related to the Tamil versus Sinhala conflicts narrated in various chronicles, the present form arises out of the inability to construct a democratic, plural, civil society. Though Sri Lanka (the Sinhala equivalent of Ilankai) is considered a nation by the United Nations Organisation, Sri Lankan nationality is yet to be recognised by the masses here. People in Lanka consider themselves as Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, Burgher, Veddha, etc. and rarely as Sri Lankans. In that sense it is a society of nationalities. As a Marxist, I consider nations are really built on capitalist market economy. I refer to a community as a nationality if that community of people are in conscious struggle to be a nation but not yet matured fully as a nation.

The word nation is loosely used to represent any group of people with a common language. But such a definition is not useful in understanding problems of nation in modern society. The identities Sinhala and Tamil were used in Lanka for a long period of time stretching as far back as third century BC. But the entity represented by the term Tamil or Sinhala is very different at different times. For example, Sinhala was used in the Anuradhapura period to represent a Vansa, a clan of people associated with a particular agriculture based on a special irrigation system. These people were considered to be of Aryan descent. Aryans were the nomadic people who invaded India around 2000 BC and over-ran Dravidian clan societies clustered around the Indus valley and elsewhere. It is widely believed that around 500BC some Aryan people came to Lanka and overpowered the Dravidian society that existed there. Thus

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there were Vansa clashes in that early period of history. These Vansa clashes continued until the end of Rajarata civilisation and the emergence of semi-feudal society in the wet zone. In this society divisions were based more on trade caste groups.

When we look at the Kandyan kingdom before the takeover by the British, we see that the word Sinhala is used to represent the ruling elite. The Radala-Mudali elite referred to themselves as the Sinhala. In this scenario not only the other caste groups in the Kandyan areas were left out of the Sinhala identity, but also the entire community in the low country who spoke Sinhala as their mother tongue. At this stage, caste was more important than any other clan identity. The word jatiya, the Sinhala word used in general today to represent a nation, was used widely at that stage to represent caste. Even today if one asks a Kandyan villager about his jatiya he may assume that as a reference to his caste. In any case at that time and until recently people in Lanka were more loyal to their caste group than any other form of community. Sinhala royalty always thought it is better to marry from Tamil royalty than to a lower caste person from the Sinhala kingdom. This thinking was not confined to the royalty but common to almost all caste groups. Even today, such thinking exists in spite of Sinhala versus Tamil national clashes.

I explain all these in order to show that the Tamil or Sinhala nations as we know them today did not exist in the past. Nation building is a relatively new phenomenon. It means that a community with the same language and tradition will unite to work democratically. This is the positive side of an emerging nation, its ability to break down caste and other parochial barriers to unite a community with equality and fraternity. In the recent past we saw the emergence of several nationalities in Lanka. The Sinhala nationality emerged with the temperance movement under Anagarika Dharmapala. Parallel to this there were movements launched by Arumugam Nawalar and Siddhi Lebbe. The Veddha community also asserted its identity under Tissahamy and others.

Thus when the British went away in 1948, Lanka remained a prison house of several nationalities. Power was concentrated in the hands of the English-speaking elite who behaved like a separate nationality. A tiny community of less than one million fake Anglo-Saxons, who relished imitating Anglo-American upper classes, appropriated and held all economic, political and social power in their hands. The Tamil upper classes considered themselves a part of this elite. In fact early leaders who collaborated with British rule were famous Tamils such as Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan. It was in their interest to build a state power on the basis of Sinhala Buddhists.

This policy was started by D.S. Senanayake and continued with vigour by the Bandaranaiques. They disenfranchised Tamil plantation workers and made the majority

of the working class stateless. A consistent campaign of discrimination was aimed at the Tamil-speaking people. While English remained the language of the rulers, Sinhala was made the sole official language to be used as a device for discrimination. Sinhala colonisation schemes were established in Tamil areas to create communal disharmony and fool the Sinhala poor masses. So-called standardisation was used to discriminate against Tamil students. All this pushed the Tamils into protest and rebellion. As early as 1930 even the Tamil elite had to break away and put separate demands to the British Raj. Then they demanded a 50/50 share in the legislative assembly, meaning that the Sinhala majority should get no more than 50% seats. Later the Federal Party was formed with the demand for autonomy for the north and the east.

In the 1950s, the Marxist movement led by the Lanka Sama Samaaja Party (LSSP) fought against this fraud and stood for equality, democracy and socialism. The Communist Party (CP) in the early 1950s passed a resolution accepting the right of self-determination for the Tamils but nothing was done to take this to the public. The Tamils and other national minority groups had much faith and expected fair play from them.

Later, however, the LSSP/CP leaders made a fundamental mistake and joined the capitalist government of Mrs Sirima Bandaranaike. Once in power they also became pawns in the hands of Sinhala chauvinism. In fact Dr Colvin De Silva, who once said “One language — two nations”[†] became the man who formulated the Buddhist theocratic constitution. This total betrayal led to much disillusionment among Tamil youth. Failure of the old left movement against Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism opened the stage for violence against the Tamil people. Racial riots broke out several times, the worst of which was in 1983. All this led to the liberation struggle of the Tamil people.

Today, the Lankan Tamil nationality is a complex entity. First, the so-called native Tamils of the north and east have developed as Eelam Tamils with a recognisable homeland. Their national consciousness has developed to a high degree among them. The existing armed struggle for Tamil liberation is based on them. Under the memorandum of understanding signed by Ranil Wickremesinghe in 2002, more than one-third of the Tamil homeland was accepted to be under the direct control of the LTTE.

Second, the plantation Tamils of the up-country, descendents of south Indian

[†] In 1956, arguing against the Sinhala-only language bill, LSSP member of parliament Colvin De Silva said that the attempt to impose one language would lead to Ceylon splitting into two nations. He said: “One language, two nations; two languages, one nation.”

Tamil workers brought to Lanka by the British Raj, have not identified entirely with the Eelam liberation struggle. Certainly the youth is highly influenced by the struggle in the north and east. But their demands are different, being very largely socio-economic. Land and citizenship rights, greater autonomy for Tamil areas, and greater Tamil participation in local administration are some of their demands.

Third, there is a substantial Tamil community living in Colombo and its suburbs. They are a combination of native and Indian Tamils. Except for the recent refugees, others are more interested in getting equality and justice than supporting the liberation struggle. However, in spite of these divisions, all Tamils are living under fear and repression. On the other hand, the war has its effect on all Tamils irrespective of their actual connection to the liberation struggle.

The Nava Sama Samaaja Party (NSSP) from its inception defended the right of self-determination of the Tamil-speaking people. Before becoming a party, as a group within the LSSP, in 1974 we came out with our analysis of the Tamil national question. We explained that Tamil nationality is emerging, fighting for its self-determination. The only unity possible is the voluntary union of the two nationalities. For this, recognition of the right of self-determination of Tamil people is a precondition. Acceptance of equality, autonomy and the right of self-determination is the only basis for a democratic unity.

Since 1974 we have been fighting for this position in all our political campaigns. In spite of many difficulties, we have managed to take this message among the Sinhala people. We have influenced the thinking of almost all political parties of Lanka. Concepts of equality, autonomy and the right of self-determination are now very widely discussed. Understanding of the masses has increased tremendously. And now there is widespread resentment against the war efforts of the government.

In 1994, Vasudava Nanayakkara and a few others broke away and collaborated with SLFP-led governments. Though they pay lip service to the Tamil liberation, in practice they have become a part of the treacherous group led by the CP and LSSP. It is clear that the Western powers are now backing the Mahinda Rajapaksa regime. We explained all along that it is futile to expect the global capitalist powers to intervene here to safeguard the interest of Tamils and Muslims or any other minority. Many Tamil leaders believe that the Indian rulers will help them to achieve freedom from discrimination and oppression. In fact they appealed for military intervention. However, the Indian intervention became a nightmare for the Tamils.

Today Sinhala chauvinists, such as Gunadasa Amarasekera, openly claim that Indian intervention was a god-sent chance for them and regret that it was not fully utilised to crush the LTTE. Now, the same thing is repeated in relation to the Western

powers led by the Americans. The Tamils have to accept that it is foolish to expect support for the Tamil struggle from the West against the Mahinda Rajapaksa government that collaborates with the development program of the West. On the other hand the LTTE appears to believe that suicidal attacks by the Tamil youth can achieve liberation. So far no efforts are made to take the issue among the left democratic forces internationally. The Left Front (NSSP) will take the issue of Tamil Liberation among left democratic forces both locally and internationally. ■

Ever since Sri Lanka (then called Ceylon) gained independence from Britain in 1948, the basic rights of the Tamil minority have been under attack.

The ruling elite from the Sinhala majority have found anti-Tamil racism an extremely convenient device to secure their power and privilege and deflect discontent from below. The history of Sri Lanka is marked by a shameful and bloody series of government-instigated anti-Tamil pogroms.

The persecuted and besieged Tamils finally turned to armed struggle to secure independence or self-government in their traditional homeland areas. With the 2009 military defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the death of its main leaders, this phase has come to an end.

The victory of the regime was made possible by the backing of the West and China. These governments — Australia included — all have blood on their hands.

Today the Sri Lankan regime has militarised the Tamil homelands and is implanting Sinhalese colonists there on a large scale. Condemned to a miserable existence in their own country, tens of thousands of Tamils have sought refuge abroad.

Many have risked their lives on decrepit boats to make a perilous journey to Australia. But rather than finding sanctuary here they are forced to endure fresh torments as they are demonised and victimised at the hands of a racist government.

Now more than ever, the oppressed Tamil people need the solidarity of progressive forces in Australia and around the world.

This pamphlet provides an essential background to the conflict from a socialist and Marxist viewpoint.

Resistance books