

Honourable councilors

Honourable councilors, as a member of the Indian Origin Plantation Hill Country Tamil Community, I would like to present my submission to the council with the expectation to promote a country where all ethnic communities can live with equal rights by enjoying autonomy within a united Sri Lanka.

I am Chairman of Institute of Social Development and a freelance political columnist and I tried to advocate Tamil armed groups and the Tamil moderate leadership on peaceful settlement, writing in the Tamil papers such as, Thinakaran and Virakesari since 1989. When the Vattukottai resolution for Tamil State was proclaimed by Tamil United Front in 1976 I was involved with a Southern leftist group which accepted the Self Determination of Tamil Community. This was later headed by a person who played a crucial role in the international arena during the final phase of the War, who was none other than the former UN High Commissioner and High Commissioner of Sri Lanka for France Dr. Dayan Jayatilake. This group was banned in 1986 by then J.R.Jaywardena government. We were given amnesty in 1989 following the Indo-Lanka accord. This group had a link with a Northern Group called E.P.R..L.F. with the intention of creating a red Tamil Eelam. I was hunted by state intelligence since 1984 for having link with Northern Group. With this brief personal introduction, I would like to submit the following to the commission.

If we look at the world history every multi-ethnic country has encountered various crises and faced violent conflicts and suffered by losing precious human and natural resources. Later the leaders of those countries looked back and searched for the root causes for the problems and sorted out those problems in a democratic manner and started to rebuild the country by ensuring the rights of all communities and giving autonomy to minority communities to protect and promote their socio, economic and cultural identity.

The leaders of our country who emerged from the majority as well as the minority community (except one or two individuals) – during the colonial era, never conducted themselves as representatives of the people of a multi ethnic Sri Lanka, nor carried forward the freedom struggle on the principle of equal rights to all people. This mind set brought about the split in the Ceylon National Congress within two years of its inception, and paved way for mushrooming of parties pursuing communalist politics. This at last developed into armed conflict which lasted for three decades.

The Sinhala and Tamil leaders who took to tit-for-tat communalist politics even after the independence never departed from their communalist approach with mass backings. This created conditions for three major ethnic riots. SWRD Bandaranaike who was the prime minister when the ethnic riot broke out in 1958, had been convinced that communalist politics would lead the country into blood bath. Addressing a SLFP convention in Kurunegala, soon after the riots he emphasized the need to put national politics before communalist politics in order to avoid the country from being plunged into a blood bath in future. His warning then, which was unheeded, subsequently proved right when hundreds of thousands of innocent lives were lost, in the long run.

Given this experience we have in the meantime to ask ourselves: must we lead this country back into a situation of sacrificing precious lives? With a firm conviction that we should not, as Sri Lankans, we must build ourselves into a national structure common to all peoples in habiting Sri Lanka.

The ethnic strife in the post independence period started with the introduction of the Official language Act in the 1950s. It sharpened further when in 1972 the republican constitution failed to address the grievances of the minorities and to guarantee the socio economic and cultural rights of the minority

communities, which is fundamental right of any community.

After continuous struggles although equal status was accorded to Tamil Language under 16th amendment to the 1978 constitution and 29 divisional secretariats in the provinces where the Tamils speaking people cohabit with the Sinhala people were gazetted bilingual, todate it has not been translated into action. Consequently any Tamil speaking person who approaches any government institutions with a high hope of having his or her business attended to in Tami has to return dissappointed. Even in the provincial councils, the situation is the same. With this bitter experience of a Tamil being that, in spite of his language being accorded equal status, he is unable to even send a telegram in Tamil, how could he or she think himself or herself a Sri Lankan with equal status and opportunities?

Since independence, up to the 2002 peace accord, a number attempts were made. However none of the accords reached were implemented fully as agreed by the rulers. Why did this happen? Because the Sinhala polity is obsessed with an idea that if the Tamil speaking people were given autonomy or even limited political power one day they would swallow up all of Sri Lanka by merging with Tamil Nadu. This fear psychosis still prevails among the Sinhala leadership. This feeling has not failed to entrench even ordinary Sinhala masses, thanks to the propaganda by Buddhists clergy and Sinhala Buddhist political parties.

In support of their argument, the propagandists cite Mahavamsa, and the invasion by Chola empire in the ancient times. Further the Tamil Nadu Dravidian party's demands for Dravidian Nation in the fifties and the traditional link between the Sri Lankan Northern Tamils, Indian Origin Plantation Tamils and the Tamil Nadu Tamils led to continuity of the fear psychosis among the Sinhala leadership and Buddhist religious leaders. This fear came to be strengthened following the fact that the Indian government armed and trained the Sri Lankan Tamil militants in the eighties.

However, if this fear persists it will be a stumbling bloc to finding a solution to the ethnic problem. Therefore, first it is important that the majority community leaders and the Buddhist religious leaders are enlightened for them to overcome this fear psychosis.

In the changing global political scenario India has changed its regional political strategy. The new Indian leadership needs peace in the region and friendly relationship with the neighboring countries in order to hold its hegemony. We must not lose cite of the fact that the Indian government is trying to remove the Sri Lankan fear and suspicion which is evident in the support it gave during the final phase of the war. India, which is trying to be part of the global capitalist competitor, will not like to create condition for hostility in her neighborhood by annexing her neighbors. Also India will not fail to bear in mind the repercussions of such attempts, if any, will have when she deals with regional demands within India.

Therefore, the Sinhala politicians, while understanding that their fear about India is unfounded, should not in the meantime, interpret the Tamil demand based on the premise of promoting their economic and cultural rights as one for a separate state., or that granting their demand would amount to conceding a demand for separate state. Therefore the Sinhala polity and the masses should be educated to overcome this fear psychosis which is first and foremost a bulwark.

At the same time the Tamil leadership should understand the fear psychosis of Sinhala polity and avoid running to Tamil Nadu to have dialogues with the Tamil Nadu parties for the consumption of the Sri Lankan Tamil community. The first Tamil Nadu Dravidian party leader and Chief Minister Mr. C.N. Annadurai once stated that the Tamils of Indian Origin should find solution for their problems by

negotiating with Sri Lankan government. The Tamil leaders should review the involvement of India and the role of Tamil Nadu politicians in the past and the repercussions of such involvements. Therefore, the Tamil Polity should stop running to Tamil Nadu and also should request the Tamil Nadu politicians to stop the racist propaganda which keeps the Sinhala racism aflame in Sri Lanka.

The two states of India we know, are Tamil Nadu and Pondicheri. Both states are autonomous though the populations are Tamil speaking. Both these land locked states are just a few feet away from each other. Pondicheri was a French colony and Tamil Nadu part English colony. After the independence both demanded separate state. Accordingly, both regions are separate from and independent of each other even today. Pondicheri does not want to be part of Tamil Nadu which is just few feet away and with which it has deep rooted blood relationship. In the meantime currently Pondicheri demands regional autonomous status similar to that of Tamil Nadu. But the Tamilians of Pondicheri contest elections under the symbols of parties which have the head quarters in Tamil Nadu such D.M.K and A.D.M. K. But they do not urge merger with Tamil Nadu.

It is because the Tamil people of Pondicheri prefer to decide on their own in relation to their economy, and socio-politics. Similarly, the people of the North and East wish; the Muslim people wish and the people of the hillcountry wish. Granting such wishes will not injure the sovereignty or territorial integrity of the country. With passage of time, the Kandyan Sinhala people may renew their 1920 demand for autonomy.

Therefore the Sinhala leaders should avoid giving separatist cover to the demand of Tamil speaking people simply on the basis of its source. If they persist baiting the demands of the Tamil people for their narrow political ends, recurrence of another blood bath at least after another decade if not immediately, cannot be ruled out. The human history abounds instances of the human race resisting denial of its rights single handedly, in groups and as a race. Similarly if their rights continue to be violated or denied, the people in the North and East which are peaceful now, will rise up again.

The 2002 peace accord was hastily concluded. No attempt was taken to have mutual dialogue and exercise like the Good Friday Agreement signed Ireland and the UK. When the Good Friday Agreement was signed it was distributed to every household of the Northern Ireland under the title of its "your choice". The militant group IRA and its political wing Sine Fein opposed the agreement. But the people of Ireland both Catholic and protestant welcomed it. Later the IRA's Sine Fein accepted it. After ten years it came a reality. However, ordinary people of the North and the South were kept in dark about the 2002 agreement.

At the same time LTTE, sticking to their separate state demand, refused to be flexible much to the annoyance and suspicion among Sinhala polity and masses. The inflexible policy on both sides made peace elusive. The democratic Tamil politicians who represented the LTTE became LTTE mouth piece, not realizing the changing scenario of the world and specially the changing role of India in relation to global and Sri Lanka politics. Even if they knew, they were helpless under LTTE fire power.

At the same time Sinhala leaders engaging in negotiations have always done so unwilling to grant the power demand of the Tamil by peaceful means and thinking that the Tamils will convert such powers into a separate state. Hence LTTE and pro LTTE moderates political leaders of the North & East were not willing to follow Win-Win policy in negotiations and rather were adamant on their demands.

In this context we should draw our attention to the Tamil Nadu democratic politicians such late C. N. Annadurai and Karunanidhi who demanded separate state in the 50s and dropped the demand in the 60s

taking into consideration the changing power system in India and opted for federal system.

In the meantime the Sinhala leadership thinks if the infrastructure is developed in the North-East then the problems of the Tamils will end. With this intention currently government engages in development rather than giving attention to the devolutions of power. If it is so, the problem of Northern Ireland could have been solved without any problem long before. The development is not adequate to solve the problems of the Tamil people or any ethnic group.

Development without political power is similar to feeding birds in cages. Mere development will never satisfy the human beings and therefore they should be allowed to decide their destiny. The concept of local government was evolved to decentralize the power. In the modern world power has been devolved to the state and local government with full autonomy.

At this juncture, it is relevant to recall that the Kandyan Sinhala people separately placed their grievances before the Donoughmore Commission along with a demand for separate powers but subsequently it led to create upcountry peasantry commission in the later parts. Even now the Kandyan peasantry commission functions and addresses the Kandyan peasant problems separately. The Sinhala Tamil conflict submerged the Kandyan Sinhala peoples conflict with their Southern counter part. Perhaps this may arise again taking into consideration the current Southern Politics. There is conflict between the Northern and Eastern Tamils: there is conflict among Muslims and Tamils there is conflict between Southern and Easter Muslims; there is also conflict between the Hill country Tamils and North-East Tamils.

In the last phase of Eelam war a considerable number of Indian Origin Hill Country Youth had taken part and sacrificed their lives. Some are still languishing in the Prisons. Why did the Hill Country youth join hand with Northern guerilla groups. In the initial phase the plantation youth had not joined any northern guerilla movement. But since the latter part of the nineties onwards the plantation youth who studied up to O/L joined the movements. Why did this happen?. When the hill country youth realized their fundamental rights were being violated they joined the movements.

The Citizenship issue of the hill country Tamils was legally solved in 2003. Until then this problem existed. Yet plantation workers are struggling to register their names in the voters list. Over a hundred thousand voters have been left out in the Central, Uva and Sabaragamuwa provinces. The plantation settlements are kept outside the Pradesiya Sabha and Provincial Council. Whenever, any development programme is designed to uplift the villages the plantation settlement are left out. The plantation parliamentarians have demanded every time for the inclusion of plantation settlement in the programme but without success.

The Indian Origin Hill country Tamil members of the Pradesiya Sabha and Provincial Council do not have the equal rights similar to their Sinhala Counter parts. Section 33 of the Pradesiya Sabha does not allow Pradesiya Sabaha members to implement any development project with out the permission of Estate Management where a Sinhala Pradesiysaba member can carry out development work in the villages.

There are several bilingual secretariat divisions in the plantation sector. There are over 23 staff officers deployed in the divisional secretariats to carry out the development activities. But a majority of them are not in a position to work in Tamil Language. The landlessness is another crucial issue in the plantation sector.

Over 85% of the plantation worker families lives in the line room built by the British. The new generation who work outside the plantations, have become homeless and they live with their parents as families in the line rooms.

The government schemes which addressed the youth issues did not include the plantation youth. This has resulted in the perpetual poverty. To overcome this, a 10 year Action Plan was drawn by the government with the participation of civil society in order to achieve the Millenium Development Goals. But this was not implemented by the government and swept it under the carpet. If this situation continues we will encounter another unrest in the plantation sector.

The Indian constitutional architect Dr. Baba Sahab Ambedkar with far sightness ensured that India was a federation of states with provisions for ethnic groups looking out for power sharing at later stage to do so. The newly emerged states such Utranchal, and Satiskar are good examples of it. This may be borne in mind in the event of introducing either new constitution or amendment to the 13th amendment.

Therefore, taking into consideration the experience of the 2002 peace accord I would like to submit the following recommendations.

1. Immediate action should be taken to implement the 13+ recommendation.
2. Distribute the 13 + document to every house hold in the country to eradicate the suspicion
3. Create a multi ethnic army by recruiting youth of North East, Hill Country Tamils Muslim, youth including ex combatant. This will eradicate the suspicion and mistrusts among ethnic communities.
4. Deploy multi ethnic army and police in every part of the country.
5. Expedite civil administration in war tone area.
6. Hold election for the Northern Provincial Council and local government and ensure the restoration of democratic institutions
7. When solving the resettlement problem please give due concern to solve the landless Indian Origin Tamil Community who migrated to the Northern province during the war period and engaged in cultivation, by giving them land for cultivation and domicile.
8. Bring the plantation settlements under Pradesiyas Sahaba
9. Ensure the bilinguality of divisional secretariats by appointing Tamil speaking officers
10. Extend the policy adopted for the rebels of 71 to the LTTE cadre.
11. Implement the all party conference recommendation in relation to Indian Origin Hill Country Community
12. Hence to support this move organize a study journey to all Sinhala political party leaders and Buddhist religious leaders to visit Tamil Nadu and Pondicheri. This will help them overcome their fear psychosis and build confidence on power devolution. This will lead to a peaceful multi ethnic coexistence region in the region.

Thank you.

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