

Sangam

Ilankai Tamil Sangam, Inc.

Ilankai Tamil Sangam, Inc. 2006

P.O. Box 46
Maryknoll, New York 10545
Phone (201) 295-0152

P.O. Box 655
30 CHESTERFIELD DRIVE
CHESTER, NEW JERSEY 07930
Phone (908) 879 0576
FAX (908) 879 0487

www.sangam.org

January 20, 2006

Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead
US Embassy
210 Galle Road
Colombo 3, Sri Lanka

Dear Ambassador Lunstead:

Sri Lanka Peace Process--Your Speech on January 9 and Clarification of January 17

We are an organization of people of Sri Lankan Tamil origin living in the US. Most of us are US citizens.

As you would expect, we are very concerned about recent developments in Sri Lanka, and the real risk of a resumption of war.

Your Speech of January 9

As you correctly observe, now "the peace process is paramount". So your comments on the process have been our main focus, even though we have read your entire speech carefully.

Given the highly volatile and dangerous situation, regrettably, your speech of January 9 to the American Chamber of Commerce, **was very unfortunate, in style and substance**. Since you have already heard from many others in response, we shall desist from debating about the "factual" basis of your comments. We recognize that reasonable people can see "facts" differently.

Our concern is about the partisan message which you clearly wanted to convey -- **first** by sharply criticizing violations by the LTTE, while making absolutely no mention of the violations directly by the government and indirectly by their paramilitary proxies, and of the obstacles to peace created by the extremist Sinhalese elements who now wield power in and with the Government: and second, **by making an explicit threat in the name of US** ---"we want the cost of a return to war to be high", ---- **only against the LTTE and consequently the Tamil people.**

Thereby you have reinforced the deep feeling among Tamils that US policy is a threat not only to the LTTE but also to the legitimate rights of the Tamil people. At the same time, you have undoubtedly given the Government, Sinhala public, and especially its security forces, the strong impression that the US is fully behind them.

The end result is that you have caused immense damage to the peace process, and to the credibility of the US role in it. US credibility had already been severely undermined by its failure to ensure the delivery of the promised CFA related international aid for the reconstruction of the North East, and even humanitarian tsunami aid.

We are compelled to point out that your speech of January 9, is just one more example of your approach as US Ambassador in regard to the peace process, which has engendered a widespread perception among Tamils, at all levels, including elected representatives, that US policy is not only biased against them in their search for a just and enduring solution, but is insensitive even to their basic human rights and needs. In this background, your assurance of an alternative vision for the Tamils vis a vis that of the LTTE leadership, (whatever their failings), shows how much you have lost touch with the reality of Tamil feelings, and their political consciousness and aspirations.

Your insensitivity to Tamil perceptions and suffering is also clearly demonstrated by the manner in which you chose to express your “blunt” threat of US action to make a “high cost of a return to war”, and to link it to a “more capable and determined Sri Lankan military” as your instrument of enforcement.

To Tamils your message could not be more ominous and partisan. In contrast, to the average Sinhalese, your words could not have been more welcome. The Tamils know only too well the costs of war, and also of the extra judicial killings, disappearances, torture and rapes which the security forces inflicted on them for years with impunity. **You also seem oblivious of the basic fact, which Tamils experience daily at great cost, that the Sri Lankan military is really and truly a virtual Sinhala military.**

Your clarification of January 17

In the above background, we appreciate your clarification issued on January 17. You have now acknowledged, by our reckoning perhaps for the first time, that blame for the deterioration really lies with both the Government and the LTTE.

We also appreciate your reiteration of the Co- Chairs call for the Government to disarm paramilitaries, as required by the CFA. The SLMM has now formally confirmed that Karuna faction is operating with the knowledge of the Sri Lankan military, if not their active support.

The emergence of the Karuna factor and the associated killings and counter killings, has been the biggest single cause of the escalating violations of the CFA. The Co- Chairs need to play an active role in pressuring the Government to take concrete and immediate steps to disarm paramilitaries. Such action by itself will unwind the violence and CFA violations.

We also welcome the clarification of your partisan and unfortunate threat of US action, referred to earlier. You now state that your intention was simply to “make it clear that a war will be more costly and unsuccessful” Unfortunately the damage to the peace process has been done, and the two sides have drawn the unavoidable conclusion that it was an explicit and partisan threat. **We would now request you to do everything you can to correct this perception, within and outside Sri Lanka.**

We believe that if the US had followed the more balanced approach now reflected in your clarification, the course of events in the peace process would have been different and positive. More importantly, we hope that this more even handed approach will continue in the future, and that the US will also publicly express concern about the threat to the peace process posed by human rights violations by security forces and by extreme Sinhala nationalist formations, and their rejection of most of the principal elements of the peace process advanced by the international community.

It is vital, at this juncture, for the US and other members of the international community to repeatedly re affirm their support for the Cease Fire Agreement and for its full implementation. Without the implementation of the CFA, the entire peace process will disintegrate.

Human Rights Violations. By Security forces and Paramilitaries

As a final comment, we would urge you to show more public sensitivity to the serious human rights violations faced by Tamil civilians in the North East, as well as in Colombo. We welcome your assurance that you have asked the government, both privately and publicly, to ensure that its forces act properly at all times.

Many see in your speech another indication of an apparent disregard for Tamil lives and suffering. There is no mention what so ever of concern or regret about the murder of Mr. Pararajasingham, and of recurrence of past patterns of systematic human rights violations by the military, even if they be of a retaliatory nature. As US Ambassador you would doubtless be aware of what is going on in the North East by way of assaults, rapes, murders and disappearances, under cover of Emergency Rule. The Human Rights Commission has reported on these. Even the Press has had detailed reporting about some of the worst offences.

Frankly we are not aware of any public expression of US concerns, certainly about the murder of Mr. Pararajasingham or on other high profile and well reported incidents like the assault on Jaffna university students and faculty, the execution like

killings of the students in Trincomalee, or Dec 31 night's abusive cordon and search of hundreds of Tamil homes in Colombo etc. **Your stubborn silence on Mr. Pararajasingham's murder, in particular is incomprehensible, and feeds into the worst fears about US policy and intentions.**

Strong public expressions of concern about them would be a simple act of humanity for the victims. The ideals that the US stands for, as repeatedly affirmed by President Bush, also demand that you speak out publicly and forcefully.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Sri Haran', written in a cursive style.

Sri Haran CPA/PFS, CFP
President
Ilankai Tamil Sangam, Inc

CC: US Secretary of State
Chairman International Relations Committee, US House of Representatives
Chairman Foreign Relations Committee, US Senate