

# AUSTRALASIAN FEDERATION OF TAMIL ASSOCIATIONS (AFTA) INC.

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**Media Release**

**26 February 2002**

## **THE CEASE-FIRE AGREEMENT IN SRI LANKA**

The Tamil Australians welcome the cease-fire agreement entered into between the Sri Lankan Government and the Tamil leadership, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam that came into force from 00.00 hours on 23 February 2002 as a significant step in the right direction. The leadership of both parties to the conflict and the Norwegian Government should be congratulated. It is pleasing to note that our Minister for Foreign Affairs Hon. Alexander Downer has released a statement to the media on 24 February 2002 welcoming this positive development.

This federation which has been voicing for the immediate end to the war and for a peacefully negotiated political solution to the five decades long ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is hopeful that the agreement will pave the way for,

- Keeping the warring military forces of both sides apart and ensure an indefinite cessation of hostilities
- The return of normalcy by the restoration of free flow of supplies of food and medicine, free movement of people and withdrawal of the armed forces from private houses, places of worship and schools etc
- Monitoring of the cease-fire by a monitoring mission that reports back to the Norwegian Government
- The de-proscription of the LTTE in Sri Lanka to grant them legal and equal status (as per the Tamil Mandate given to the Tamil National Alliance at the December 5 Parliamentary Elections and as collectively demanded at the various peaceful marches being staged in the Tamil homeland) so that political negotiations could commence.

This cease-fire agreement is only the beginning of what is acknowledged by the Norwegian Government as a long road towards a political settlement that requires determination and courage and one that will face risks and uncertainties.

This federation is of the view that the international community should persuade the Sri Lankan Government to negotiate with the LTTE a meaningful constitutional frame work so that both the Tamil and Sinhala nations could co-exist in harmony in that island whilst respecting the rights and aspirations of the Muslims and other minorities.

The Australian Government should come forward to provide humanitarian assistance to the needy in the war affected areas in Sri Lanka and offer every support to the Norwegian peace effort. This should include an offer to host the talks in Australia. Perhaps this offer could be communicated to the Sri Lankan Government when our Foreign Minister meets with his Sri Lankan counter part at the forthcoming CHOGM in Brisbane.

The international media should come forward to visit the war-affected parts of Sri Lanka to expose the terrible sufferings endured by the Tamil people, their legitimate political aspirations and the need to offer humanitarian assistance.

### **For further information:**

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**Member Associations:** Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Darwin, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney, Auckland & Wellington

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