

“Our struggle has a legitimate political objective”

Mr. Velupillai Pirapaharan, the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), urged Sinhala people to reject racist forces committed to militarism and war and to offer justice to the Tamils, to bring about peace, ethnic reconciliation and economic prosperity to the island.



Pirapaharan: “It is only through a deep insight into the origins of political violence that one can discern the differences between authentic liberation struggles and blind acts of terror.”

ENUNCIATING the organisation’s policy in his annual Heroes’ Day speech Tuesday, the Tamil Tiger leader declared that the Tamil people wanted to live in their traditional lands with peace and dignity, determining their own political and economic life. “It is the basic political aspiration of the Tamil people. This is neither separatism nor terrorism. It does not constitute a threat to the Sinhala people,” Mr. Pirapaharan said.

Extracts from Mr. Pirapaharan’s speech were issued in press release from the LTTE’s Headquarters Tuesday, the full text of which follows:

In a special appeal made to the majority Sinhala people faced with crucial parliamentary election early next month in Sri Lanka, Mr. Velupillai Pirapaharan, the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), urged them to reject racist forces committed to militarism and war and to offer justice to the Tamil people to bring about peace, ethnic reconciliation and economic prosperity to the island.

Enunciating the organisation’s policy in his annual Heroes’ Day speech today, the Tamil Tiger leader declared that the Tamil people wanted to live in their traditional lands with peace and dignity, determining their own political and economic life. “It is the basic political

aspiration of the Tamil people. This is neither separatism nor terrorism. It does not constitute a threat to the Sinhala people,” Mr. Pirapaharan said.

The LTTE leader said that the Sinhalese, Tamils and other communities in the island could co-exist in peace and harmony if a political settlement is reached through peaceful means. But he warned that the Tamils would be left with no alternative other than to secede and form an independent state if the Sinhala nation continued to refuse to resolve the conflict through peaceful means. “If racism continues to predominate as the determining force in Sri Lanka’s politics, it will certainly create the objective conditions for the emergence of an independent Tamil state,” Mr. Pirapaharan said.

The Tiger leader declared that the LTTE is sincerely committed to a negotiated political settlement. Yet he insisted that lifting of the ban on his organisation is a necessary pre-requisite for the LTTE to participate in the peace talks as the legitimate, authentic representatives of the Tamil people.

Expressing regret and dismay over the decision made by some Western governments to include the LTTE in the list of international terrorist organisations, Mr. Pirapaharan asserted that the LTTE is a freedom movement fighting for the emanci-

pation of his oppressed people. Branding the LTTE as a terrorist organisation will have a negative effect on the peace process since it would encourage Sri Lanka to adopt a hard-line militarist approach, Mr. Pirapaharan said. The Tiger leader also called for a clear and comprehensive definition of the concept of terrorism that would distinguish between armed liberation struggles based on the right to self-determination and blind terrorist acts based on hatred and fanaticism.

The following are extracts from Mr. Pirapaharan’s statement:

“The Tamil national question, which has assumed the character of a civil war, is essentially a political issue. We still hold a firm belief that this issue can be resolved by peaceful means. If there is genuine will and determination on the part of the Sinhalese leadership there is a possibility for peace and settlement. Though fifty-three years have passed since the independence of this island, the Sinhalese political leadership is still buried in the swamp of racist ideology. That is why they have not developed the wisdom and understanding to deal with the Tamil question objectively and realistically. The belief that the Tamil ethnic conflict could be resolved by repressive military means still predominates the

Sinhala political system. It is precisely for this reason that none of the major Sinhala political parties have any concrete projects or frameworks for the permanent resolution of the conflict. The international community is fully aware of this fact. These world governments, while insisting that the ethnic conflict should be resolved by peaceful means, have always supported Sri Lanka’s political and military efforts to weaken the political struggle of the Tamils. This strange, ambiguous attitude of the world governments has also contributed to the prolongation of the conflict.

We are constantly knocking on the doors of peace but the Kumaratunga government has refused to open the doors. Following the meeting with the Norwegian peace envoys in Vanni in November last year, we declared a unilateral ceasefire for four months to help to facilitate the peace process. The Sri Lanka government responded by ridiculing and rejecting our peace initiative and launched provocative military assaults on our positions. Finally, the government undertook a major offensive operation within hours of the termination of our cease-fire. Our fierce counter-attack repulsed the army’s operation and made the government realise the fact that the LTTE is strong and invinc-

ble. Though we are strong with considerable manpower and firepower we abstained from launching any major land based offensive operations this year to facilitate the peace process. We cooperated with Norway’s peace efforts. It was under these circumstances that Kumaratunga’s government downgraded and marginalised the accredited Norwegian peace envoy, Mr. Erik Solheim, accusing him of being biased towards the LTTE. We registered a strong protest against this action. Following this incident the Norwegian peace effort reached a stalemate. Chandrika Kumaratunga is responsible for this issue.

A parliamentary general election is taking place in Sri Lanka at this critical historical turning point. Since we advance our political struggle as an extra-parliamentary liberation organisation we do not attach any significance to parliamentary elections. Yet the LTTE has become the central theme in the current election campaign in Tamil Eelam and in the Sinhala south.

Having assumed itself as the most crucial and cardinal issue in Sri Lankan politics, the Tamil national conflict has effectively polarised the political forces towards two contradictory positions: between war and peace. The elections have become a competitive arena between the forces that seek peace and the extremist forces that are opposed to peace. The general public is given the responsibility of choosing as to whether there will be peace in the future or if the war will continue. The Sinhala people should realise that there can be no peace, ethnic harmony and economic prosperity in the island as long as the Tamil people are denied justice and their political aspirations are not fulfilled.

We are not enemies of the Sinhala people, nor is our struggle against them. It is because of the oppressive policy of the racist Sinhala politicians that contradictions arose between the Sinhala and Tamil nations, resulting in a war. We are fighting this war against a state and its armed forces determined to subjugate our people through the force of arms. We are well aware that this war has not only affected the Tamils but also affects the Sinhala people deeply. Thousands of innocent Sinhala youth have perished as a consequence of the repressive policies of the war mongering ruling elites. We are also aware that it is the Sinhala masses who are bearing the economic burden of the war. Therefore, we call upon the Sinhala people to identify and renounce the racist forces committed to militarism and war and to offer justice to the Tamils in order to put an end to this bloody war and to bring about permanent peace.

The Tamil people want to maintain their national identity and to live in their own lands, in their historically given homeland with peace and dignity. They want to determine their own political and economic life; they want to be on their own. These are the basic political aspirations of the Tamil people. It is neither separatism nor terrorism. These demands do not constitute a threat to the Sinhala people. They do not in any way affect or undermine the political liberties or

the social, economic and cultural life of the Sinhala people. The Tamil people favour a political solution that would enable them to live in their own lands with the right to rule themselves. This is what the Tamils mean when they emphasise that a political solution should be based on the right to self-determination.

Our organisation is prepared to negotiate with the Sri Lanka government on a political framework that would satisfy the basic political aspirations of the Tamil people. But for us to participate in political negotiations freely as equal partners, as the authentic political force with the status of legitimate representatives of our people, the ban imposed on our movement should be lifted. This is the collective aspiration of the Tamil people.

We want the peace talks to be held in cordial situation of mutual trust and understanding. For a long time we have been emphasising that the peace talks should take place in a conducive atmosphere of peace and normalcy in the absence of war and economic embargoes. We wish to reiterate the same position now.

The use of violence in all modes of struggles to attain specific political goals is defined as terrorism by international governments. This narrow definition has erased the distinctions between genuine struggles for political independence and terrorist violence. This conception of terrorism has posed a challenge to the moral foundation of armed struggles waged by liberation movements for basic political rights and for the right to self-determination. This development is regrettable. As a consequence our liberation organisation is also being discredited in the international arena.

The world governments waging a war against terror should, first of all, explore the root causes of political violence. It is only through a deep insight into the origins of political violence that one can discern the differences between authentic liberation struggles and blind acts of terror.

In our view, there are two dimensions in political violence. Firstly, there is the violence of the oppressor. Secondly, there is the violence of the oppressed. In most cases the oppressor belongs to the ruling elites, yields state authority and command the armed forces. The oppressed are always the ruled, the minority nationalities, the exploited and the poor. The violence of the first category can be designated as state violence. The second category can be termed as the violence against state violence. Since state violence is a form of repressive violence of the oppressor, it is unjust. The reactive violence of the oppressed is just since it is undertaken with the motive of obtaining justice. It is within the context of this distinction that the violent modes of political struggles of the oppressed find legitimacy.

Violent forms of struggles by people seeking political rights emerge only as reactive violence against state terror. This truth can be discerned if one can objectively analyse the historical origins of the world liberation organisations. The Tamil Eelam liberation struggle has similar historical origins. The state oppression against

the Tamil people originated two decades before the birth of the Tamil Tigers. Fuelled by racist passion, the state repression gradually intensified over time and assumed genocidal proportions.

All forms of peaceful non-violent agitations undertaken by the Tamil people against Sinhala state oppression were brutally repressed by state terror. Since the non-violent political struggle became futile and meaningless and at the same time the state oppression intensified in the form of genocide the Tamil people were left with no alternative other than to confront the state violence with violence. In other words, the Tamil people were compelled to take arms to defend themselves against genocidal destruction. It was under these objective historical conditions the Liberation Tigers took birth and advanced the armed struggle against state terror. With the history of a sustained campaign extending to a period of twenty years our armed resistance has evolved and developed as the political mode of struggle of the Tamil people.

We are a national liberation organisation. We are fighting for the emancipation of our people against racist tyranny, against military occupation, against state terror. Our struggle has a concrete, legitimate political objective. Our struggle is based on the right to self-determination, a principal endorsed by the United Nations Charter. We are not terrorists. We are not mentally demented as to commit blind acts of violence impelled by racist and religious fanaticism. We are fighting and sacrificing our lives for the love of a noble cause i.e. human freedom. We are freedom fighters. The Sinhala state terrorists, who have failed in their efforts to crush our freedom movement for the last two decades, branded our liberation struggle as terrorism. Misguided by the false and malicious propaganda of the Sri Lanka state some of the world governments have included our liberation movement in their list of international terrorist organisations. This is regrettable and disappointing. These decisions have a negative impact. They have been made in haste, without deep insight into the historicity and legitimacy of our struggle for self-determination. It sends a wrong message to the Sinhala racist rulers. It will further harden their hard-line, intransigent attitude. It will encourage the policy of military repression. On the whole, the actions of some of the Western governments will seriously impede a political solution through peaceful means and further complicate the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

All the member countries of the United Nations have joined the alliance in the war against terrorism spearheaded by the Western powers. Some of the repressive states with a notorious history of racist oppression and gross human rights violations have joined this global alliance against terror. In this context we wish to confine our remarks only to the Sri Lanka state. This government, holding one of the highest records of human rights violations amounting to genocide, has now joined the international alliance against terrorism. This is a dangerous trend in the

emerging new world order. This new trend is also posing a threat to the legitimate political struggles of the oppressed humanity subjected to state terror. We fully understand the anger, apprehensions, and compulsions of the Western powers engaged in a war against international terrorism. We welcome the counter-terrorist campaign of the international community to identify and punish the real terrorists. In this context it is crucial that the Western democratic nations should provide a clear and comprehensive definition of the concept of terrorism that would distinguish between freedom struggles based on the right to self-determination and blind terrorist acts based on fanaticism. The international community cannot ignore the phenomenon of state terror practiced internally by some repressive regimes. The world should seek to identify such terrorist states and penalise them.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam is a people’s movement. We are inextricably integrated with the people into a unified single force fighting collectively for the liberation of our homeland. In a devious strategy to alienate and marginalise our liberation organisation from our people and to destroy us the government of Chandrika Kumaratunga proscribed us as a ‘terrorist’ organisation. Following this decision, Chandrika’s government, particularly its Foreign Minister Mr. Kadrigamar, launched a sustained propaganda campaign in the international arena portraying the LTTE and the Tamil freedom struggle as a diabolical phenomenon of terrorism. As a consequence the United States, Britain and most recently Canada, have included our liberation movement in their lists of terrorist organisations. These countries are fully aware that we are not a terrorist organisation and that we are a freedom movement functioning with the overwhelming support of our people, representing their political aspirations. Furthermore, these countries have continued to insist that the LTTE and the Sri Lanka government should engage in peace talks to resolve the ethnic conflict. This stand clearly entails the fact that these countries do recognise the Liberation Tigers as the political representatives of the Tamil people. If so, why did the governments brand us as a terrorist organisation? We cannot understand the logic as to how such action could facilitate the peaceful resolution of the ethnic conflict. We hold the position that unless the Sri Lanka government lifts the ban on our organisation and accepts us as the authentic, legitimate representatives of the Tamil people we will not participate in the peace negotiations. We are firmly committed to this position. We have also clearly stated our position to the Norwegian government. There is a possibility of peace in the island of Sri Lanka only when the LTTE is de-proscribed. Under these circumstances, proscribing the LTTE by Western governments giving into diplomatic pressures from Sri Lanka will not pave the way for the peaceful negotiated settlement of the conflict. Rather, it will further reinforce the collective demand of our people to lift the ban on the LTTE for the resumption of peace talks”.

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