

Is International community's Conscience Clear?

No political cause, or national struggle, however moral, however fair and however conforming to the International Community's expectations in the UN Charter, can survive unless supported by matching fire-power as is evident in the case of the national struggle of the Tamils in the island of Sri Lanka.

The democratic and non-violent struggle during the first thirty years after the island's independence from foreign yoke in 1948 and the armed struggle during the last twenty-five years prove the mettle of a resolute nation, owing its past to those heroes who sacrificed their lives for its success; owing its present to those at home and abroad who withstood denial of human and humanitarian rights, segregations, pogroms, embargoes, internal and external displacements, yet tightened their belts for the nation's upkeep; and owing its future to those who at their tender age are witnessing and are going to witness the dedication and sacrifice rendered by those before them, to win back their homeland so that they may breathe the air of dignity, liberty, equality and fraternity.

It is in this background that the International Federation of Tamils, IFT, invites the International Community, IC, to go down its memory lane, to re-visit its conscience, to re-assess its position and to decide on a firm stand that will enhance human dignity, liberty, equality and fraternity so that peace may prevail in the island and in the region.

The IC tended to remain a spectator for a long time from the sidelines when the governments of Sri Lanka were, with their intimidating human rights violations, able to contain the freedom struggle of the Tamils, till the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, LTTE, gradually emerged to match Sri Lankan forces on land and sea and finally proved its superiority at the Katunayake Air Force Complex. It was the situation that demanded early IC interference to save a near-paralysed government and a limping economy.



It is a pity the International Community has not changed its stance between periods before and after the Cease Fire Agreement (CFA). It was the IC that brought in the CFA through Norway. As facilitators and Co-Chairs, the IC had its moral obligation to treat both parties to the conflict equally. The IC should have prevailed on both parties to avoid confrontations and arrive at an amicable and acceptable resolution to the national conflict. However, it allowed and helped the Sri Lanka government to continue purchase armaments to re-build its military strength, perhaps to encourage a military solution. On the other hand, it has refused to let LTTE visit European capitals, if not to consult the expatriate Tamils living in large numbers there, but at least to present the case of the Tamils to the western governments. Ironically, the IC, instead of containing anti-CFA activities, has allowed the government of Sri Lanka to present its anti-Tamil propaganda in the courts and halls of European countries through its Embassies and High commissions. If the LTTE went on participating in peace talks, one after the other since 2002, it was because of its implicit faith in the IC to see the talks would soon match action, ie., implementation of the CFA.

It was only at the end of six rounds of talks that the LTTE realised that what the Sinhala polity did during non-violent bargaining years before they took up arms, was being repeated now, with the IC acting as a silent, nonchalant spectator. Even when the LTTE walked away, demanding implementation of the CFA before the next talks, the IC did not care to prevail on the Sinhala polity to implement the CFA.

The Tsunami devastation was a diabolical phenomenon that evoked human sympathy throughout the world. P-TOMS was a humanitarian relief package assembled by the IC and forwarded through Norway to help rebuild the North-East. Chandrika Bandaranayake made it official by having the document signed by a minister but shelved it as soon as the Sinhala polity exerted pressure on her. And by its silence and nonchalance, IC caved in to the protest from the Sinhala polity.

The P-TOMS was Co-Chair's humanitarian relief package to Tamil victims. IC failed in its duty by the Tamils.

The Tsunami of 2004 and the spontaneous human reaction that followed will, one day in future, puzzle social anthropologists conducting research, as to whether Tamils in Sri Lanka suffered from any mental or physical inadequacies into full evolutionary development as humans, for world leaders rushing out to condole with the victims in every nook and corner of the devastated areas had tended to ignore Tamils alone in their sympathy-tour itinerary.

An earlier opportunity for the IC to act was when Chandrika Bandaranayake, the President, took over three ministries in Ranil Wickremasinghe cabinet, connected with the implementation of the CFA. Soon afterwards, she dismissed Ranil's government responsible for handling peace talks and CFA. She said she was opposed to the implementation of CFA. The IC may not have wished to interfere with the internal affairs of a state although Chandrika's actions were a gross violation of democracy. But, as Co-Chairs, IC had its obligation to see through the implementation. Yet the IC did not. It failed in its duty by the Tamils and as an unbiased facilitator.

The Presidential Election and the election propaganda provided the world an opportunity to witness the external manifestation of the innate hatred the Sinhala polity and the masses at large had towards the Tamil people. Mahinda Rajapakse and his partners, the Nationalist Extremist JVP and the Buddhist Chauvinist JHU, harmonised in unison to reject the CFA in full, eject Norway from the scene, bring China in place and push the country back in time to pre-1956 days. More than the rhetoric of the extremist triumvirate, it was the stoic silence of the IC that gave a sense of exasperated betrayal to the Tamil people who, as a last resort, flocked in all major cities in the North-East at Tamil Resurgence Conventions to demand LTTE leadership to lead Tamil struggle for right to self-determination, recognition of Tamil Homeland and nationhood.

Polarisation in the political scenario of the island of Sri Lanka, after the Presidential Election is a feature the IC has tended to ignore. Volcanic eruption is being misunderstood for bush-fire. The President himself has admitted to the Tamil Members of Parliament that there were units in the military defying him when they were discussing the incidents in which Joseph Pararajasingham, a Tamil member of Parliament was shot dead in a well attended cathedral during Christmas midnight service, and the incident in which five Tamil teenage students in Trincomalee were pushed down to the ground and shot at close range behind the ear on 2 January 2006. Rampage by Sri Lanka Security Forces and the paramilitary groups in the North-East took a routine form featuring arrests of students, barricading universities, schools and seats of Higher Education, midnight cordoned-off searches, arbitrary arrests, rapes, involuntary disappearances and mass intimidation. Although the SLMM, a number of INGOs, and the victims themselves, reported these to the world, the IC continued to remain lackadaisical and nonchalant.

Although much hope was placed in the recently held Geneva Talks, it could not but escape the attention of political observers that the government was trying to (i) Hoodwink the world it was pro-settlement; (ii) buy time to conduct a much-wanted local government election; (iii) buy time to fortify the State Armed Forces; and (iv) have EU's travel ban on the LTTE continued.

While the President was expressing his willingness to send a team to the Peace Talks in Geneva, his partners, the JVP and JHU, whose counsel he said he would uphold, wanted the CFA abrogated and Talks not held outside Sri Lanka. Despite the bidding of the joint statement at Geneva to disarm armed groups in the North-East and to abide by CFA, the army and paramilitary violence and violations in Tamil areas have escalated.

In the East, armed groups from the state controlled areas crossed the no-man's-land, the day after the joint statement and gunned down senior LTTE officials at Vavunativu; a number of ordinary Tamil and Muslim civil-

ians were murdered at Batticaloa, Valaichenai and at Akkaraippattu; and a paramilitary group's office was opened at Batticaloa. While the government and the military were denying the existence of paramilitary groups, Karuna, a renegade leader, in an interview to the Reuters, two days after the Joint Statement at Geneva, stated categorically that, "No one can impose their will or take away our arms..."

In the North, teenage-school boys at St. Henry's College, Ilavalai, were assaulted on way back home; civilian fishing boat off Mathagal was run-over by navy's Dvora patrol boat and fishermen assaulted; at Delft, an island off Jaffna, three notorious EPDP paramilitaries continue roaming the streets brandishing guns; more traditional fishing grounds have been made out of bounds for local Tamil fishermen; bridges of strategic importance in the peninsula have been fortified by the Sri Lanka army with watch-towers, trenches and additional checkpoints; education officers and principals have been summoned by the Provincial military chiefs to the army barracks and warned to maintain vigilance over students; and more secret enclosures have been erected at Muhamalai for interrogating passengers crossing the checkpoint. The SLMM, aware of all these, has held on-the-spot investigations and attested to a number of army and paramilitary breaches both in the North and East.

In the South, the JVP is clamouring for the abrogation of the Cease Fire Agreement. It has issued statements in Parliament, calling for getting rid of Norway as facilitator in future negotiations. The JHU has insisted that no paramilitary group should be disarmed before disarming the LTTE. These two extremist parties, along with the President, have renewed their pledge to stick to seeking resolution to the national problem under a unitary state system and reject the Federal proposal made by the Co-Chairs.

By procuring mass scale arms from Pakistan and China and building up its military strength on one hand, and by fortifying its military capacity in the North-East and escalating and intensifying provocations and

intimidations on the Tamil civilians living in those areas, the Sri Lanka polity, may be seeking to provoke the LTTE into losing its patience and starting the war first, so that it could justify its imposition of a military resolution to the national problem.

The IC, trigger-happy to slap the LTTE with travel-ban penalty writs and strictures in November, 2005, now, by its continued silence, appears to be condoning the stand of the extremist nationalist triumvirate ruling the island.

Thousands of internally displaced Tamils have not been able to get back their own houses to live in. They have not been able to go into their own traditional farming lands to farm and cultivate. They have not been able get back into their traditional fishing grounds to earn their normal living. Inundated with huge military presence and High Military Zones, Tamils are unable to move freely about, in their traditional areas and enjoy life. They are yearning for their freedom. They know the panacea for these is in realisation of their self-determination and in obtaining recognition of their traditional homeland and nationhood.

The LTTE is continuing to exercise patience and keeping its word, bound by the Cease Fire Agreement.

The Tamil people feel they have been let down by the International community. They are still hopeful the IC, especially the Co-Chairs will soon be bold and fair by them. They are pleading with the LTTE to be resolute once and for all. They want the LTTE to lead them realise their goal.