

# **Stop the War! The Tamil National Question in Sri Lanka Demands a Political Solution!**

Text of CPI (ML) Central Committee Statement on developments in Sri Lanka

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The Sri Lankan government's ongoing military campaign to corner and crush the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE) has led to a terrible humanitarian crisis in the country. Reports emanating from the island indicate that the Sri Lankan state is on the verge of wresting military control over large parts of LTTE territory including the administrative headquarters in Killinochi. While the number of people killed so far in the crossfire between the advancing Sri Lankan armed forces is anybody's guess, some 500,000 people are estimated to have been displaced and rendered homeless in their own land. With the Sri Lankan government not allowing any relief to reach the people in refugee camps, international humanitarian organisations have been forced to leave the battle zones and recently even UN food convoys have had to return, leaving a vast population in the battle zones on the brink of starvation.

Over the last two years the military balance has steadily tilted against the LTTE. Following the collapse of peace talks and withdrawal of Norway from the peace process, the Mahinda Rajapaksha government seized the opportunity to go for an all-out fight to the finish. In the post 9/11 international situation, the LTTE has already suffered considerable international isolation with the entire Western and developed world declaring it a banned terrorist organisation. The December 2004 tsunami had also delivered a crucial blow to the economy and general life in the LTTE areas. The magnitude of the disaster was compounded manifold with the forces of Sinhala chauvinism disrupting the relief and resettlement plans drawn up under the Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS). A split in LTTE following the desertion of the organisation's eastern commander Colonel Karuna must have also prompted Colombo's decision to push for a final military solution.

Even as the Sri Lankan armed forces intensify the war on LTTE, and the death toll keeps mounting, President Mahinda Rajapaksha waxed eloquent in the 63<sup>rd</sup> session of the UN General Assembly in September 2008 on the goals of peace, resettlement and development. Quoting Isaac Newton, he lamented that the world was building too many walls and not enough bridges! He would like the world to believe that his government was employing military means only against those who were engaged in armed struggle. If it were really so, why has his government forced international relief organisations and humanitarian agencies from the battle zones?

The Sri Lankan government must understand that there can be no military solution to the Tamil national question. Even if the LTTE is militarily defeated, the national question will continue to haunt Sri Lanka. It must also understand that its attempt to impose Sinhala chauvinism as the exclusive Sri Lankan identity is doomed to fail. It is a political problem which modern Sri Lanka inherited from the British colonial days, and can only be resolved politically. Following the 1983 pogrom in which Sinhala chauvinists had killed thousands of Tamils, the LTTE had emerged as the predominant representative of Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka. In spite of its overwhelming

emphasis on armed struggle and the demand for a separate Tamil Eelam, in the course of the peace talks the LTTE had agreed to the notion of 'internal' self-determination of Tamils within the framework of a federal Sri Lanka . The Sri Lankan government must resume this process and stop the war on Sri Lankan Tamils.

The Government of India must take urgent bilateral and multilateral initiative to stop the ongoing civil war in Sri Lanka , bring about an immediate cease-fire and ensure relief and rehabilitation measures for the displaced Tamil people in the battle zones. In recent times several Indian fishermen have also been killed by the Sri Lankan naval forces. India has lacked a consistent policy regarding Sri Lanka - initially India was believed to be patronising LTTE while later the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) got embroiled in a disastrous war with the LTTE itself. Many political forces in Sri Lanka, both among Sinhala and Tamil circles, found the Indian intervention in the 1980s objectionable and smacking of regional hegemonic ambitions of the Indian ruling classes. Since then and especially following the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991, India has failed to evolve any effective diplomatic response to the civil war in Sri Lanka . The current phase of the war in Sri Lanka does call for an urgent and appropriate Indian response to bring about an immediate cessation of the war and facilitate a negotiated political settlement of the question of Tamil self-determination in Sri Lanka .

CPI (ML) Central Committee (India)

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