

Sri Lanka : Speech in Jaffna at joint opposition protest on 1 May 2012

Friday 18 May 2012, by [LANKAPELI Dharmasiri](#) (Date first published: 1 May 2012).

Speech made by Dharmasiri Lankapeli, member of the Politbureau of the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP - Sri Lanka section of the Fourth International) at the joint opposition demonstration and rally on International Workers Day in Jaffna.

Firstly, at this historic rally I apologise to the people in the North for not being able to address them in the Tamil language, as well as for the inability to provide them my speech in Tamil translation.

I would like to mention that while this historic demonstration and rally of the joint opposition is taking place in Jaffna, leftist parties including the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) and the Frontline Socialist Party (the breakaway wing of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) are celebrating May Day in a grand scale at the Price Park in Colombo under some common slogans:

- Equalise the minimum wage of the workers of the public and the private sectors at Rs12,500
- Provide a minimum cost-of-living allowance of Rs5000
- Gazette the value of the cost-of-living index at Rs280 per point
- Raise the minimum daily wage of the plantation worker to Rs500
- Provide an acceptable political solution to the national question
- Remove the military from civil administration in the North and East

I would also like to state that not only the government and the pro-government media, but some so-called members of the opposition strived to sabotage this rally. The success of this rally is a good lesson to all of them. For those who act like 'mini-Mahindas' while talking about Mr. Sajith Premadasa [1] as the opposition's alternative to Mahinda [Rajapakse], this is a slap across the face. This country does not need two 'Mahindas' [2].

I would like to tell you first that the joint opposition including the Tamil National Alliance is holding this historic protest rally today against the anti-democratic ways of Mahinda Rajapakse's government, particularly against the extreme suppression unleashed on the Tamil people in the North.

You can see that from Vavuniya to Jaffna there are more than 15 army brigades. There are also three or four security forces headquarters in the North alone. There is not space for the Tamil people even to breathe freely. It was not only that, thousands of people were buried in the land that they were born by the war; and now they face the horrible tragedy of losing all they own including home, property and other resources. People in the North have become inmates of an open air prison. This is a rally which demands an acceptable solution to the national question.

It is not only the people in the North who have become prisoners. Let me tell you an interesting story. Recently I had the chance to travel through the North to see the extent of destruction by the war. The vehicle we were travelling broke down and while waiting for it to be repaired, I walked a little further away from the vehicle. There were four or five youths further away. One of them came towards me and asked whether I was from the media. I thought that it was the end for me, because as an active street protestor against the government's suppression my name has been on top of their 'hit list'. At that moment I also remembered about the abductions by white vans.

"Sir, please write about us as well. We are called Ranaviru ('war heroes') but our status is lower than that of a wage-earner. A wage-earner has to work only 8 hours a day but we have to work 24 hours. There is no way for us to take leave. We were given a tie. Rs450 was deducted from our salary for it. It is not even worth Rs200. What do we do with a tie? We were given a coin as a souvenir and Rs. 2500 was deducted from our salary as its worth. We were also told that any bank will accept the coin (if we needed to pawn it for quick cash). But no bank accepts it now. Sir, please write about these things," said that young man.

This is the reality. The soldiers thought of living harmoniously in that prosperous world which was to be created after the war, with their families. However, at present it is not only the people in the North who are prisoners – even these soldiers have become prisoners of the regime.

Today there is no freedom to raise dissenting political views; and no freedom of expression. This government has imposed oppression on all. When the workers protest, court procedures are used against them. Lalith Kumar Veeraraj and Kugan Muruganandan [3] were abducted and still they are missing. The *Uthayan* [4] newspaper was set on fire. Media personnel are being assaulted and killed. *Uthayan* journalist, Kuganathan, was brutally assaulted near an army checkpoint.

Victory to the struggle of the joint opposition to attain a country with freedom and democracy for the people by removing this anti-people government which suppresses the workers and abducts those who hold opposing views!

On behalf of the Nava Sama Samaja Party, I salute all those who defied the conspiracies and the challenges to attend this rally in person. *Jayawewa!* [Victory for all!]

Dharmasiri Lankapeli, Jaffna – 1 May 2012

P.S.

* <http://transcurrents.com/news-views/archives/12110>

* Translated from Sinhala by Anasuya C. and edited by K. Govindan.

Footnotes

[1] Deputy-leader of the United National Party (UNP), who is a contender for leadership of the UNP and whose supporters opposed the UNP's decision to hold its May Day rally in Jaffna, and in alliance with the Tamil National Alliance (TNA).

[2] That is, two Sinhala nationalist leaders.

[3] Two Tamil-origin activists of the Movement for Peoples Struggle (Jana Aragala – predecessor of the Frontline Socialist Party) abducted in Jaffna and missing since 9 December 2011.

[4] Anti-government Tamil-language newspaper published in Jaffna and published by a Tamil National Alliance parliamentarian.