

**PRESS RELEASE**  
AHRC-FP-004-2006

**A Forwarded Press Release by the Sri Lanka Democracy Forum**

## **SRI LANKA: SLDF Calls on Sri Lanka Donor Co-Chairs and India to Pressure the Sri Lankan State to Address Human Rights and Humanitarian Concerns and Progress on a Political Settlement**

For Immediate Release

6 September 2006

The Sri Lanka Democracy Forum (SLDF) is deeply concerned about the deteriorating human security and political situation in Sri Lanka. Hundreds of people have been killed or disappeared and over 200,000 more displaced, along with over ten thousand refugees fleeing to India, due to the latest round of fighting between the Tamil Tigers and Government forces resulting in a mounting human rights and humanitarian crisis mainly in the North and East of Sri Lanka.

The ongoing undeclared war has shattered any confidence the civilian population had in the possibility of peace. In particular, the Tamil and Muslim populations have had to bear the cost of the military ambitions of the security forces, the LTTE and the Karuna faction.

Even at this late hour, if peace is to remain on the agenda, the Co-Chairs and India need to coordinate and push for necessary mechanisms that will address the human rights and humanitarian crisis as well as pressure the Government and the political parties in the opposition to move towards a consensus to address the legitimate aspirations of the Tamil and Muslim communities.

### **Human Rights and Humanitarian Crisis**

SLDF has consistently highlighted the dangers of human rights violations, emphasizing that in time these would lead to the collapse of the peace process. Indeed, it is the unwillingness or lack of political will on the part of all actors, including the international community and the human rights community, to systematically pressure for a human rights mechanism that led to the emergence of a human rights crisis, which in turn has transformed into what is today one of the most severe humanitarian catastrophes the country has faced.

On 10 August 2006, Jan Egeland, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, put Sri Lanka next to Lebanon and Darfur as humanitarian disasters of immense proportions caused by, among other factors, the killings of aid workers and lack of humanitarian access. The UN Secretary General has also made multiple statements highlighting his concern about the human rights and humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka. A crisis of this proportion requires the attention of the United Nations at the highest level and it is only the ultimate multi-lateral institution that can respond effectively given this crisis.

SLDF welcomes the Common Humanitarian Action Plan put forward by the UN agencies and calls on the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and the LTTE to abide by its stipulations and lend it every support. However, effectively addressing the humanitarian crisis also requires human rights mechanisms that can address the prevailing culture of impunity and the ongoing gross violations of human rights, where tens of individuals are killed or disappeared daily, children are recruited by both the LTTE and the Karuna faction, and civilians are forced into military training blurring the line between civilians and combatants.

SLDF supports the 12 August 2006 Co-Chairs call "for independent, international investigations of allegations of serious human rights abuses, including the murder of 17 Sri Lankans working for a French NGO and the alleged killing of 100 Muslims." Furthermore, SLDF welcomes President Rajapakse's invitation for an "international independent commission to probe abductions, disappearances and extra-judicial killings in all areas in the country." Such a commission should be appointed under the auspices of the UN and immediately begin the work of investigating some of the most glaring instances of gross human rights violations, such as the murder of aid workers and Muslims in Mutur in August 2006, the murder of five youth in Trincomalee in January 2006, and massacres in Alaipiddy, Welikanda, Vankalai, and Kebetigollewa in May and June 2006. A special investigation should be carried out surrounding the circumstances in which over 400 adolescent girls (between

the ages of 17 to 20) from 18 different schools found themselves in a building on 14 August 2006 at Vallipuram in Mullaitivu, 55 of whom were to become victims of a bombing raid by the Sri Lankan Air Force.

The human rights crisis is also exacerbated by daily targeted killings of individuals, and this climate of impunity requires an independent international mechanism to undertake long-term human rights monitoring. The current spate of extortion and disappearance of Tamils, especially businessmen that has spilt over into Colombo and so obviously enjoys the connivance of the law enforcement authorities is merely a reflection of the build up of impunity in the regions, especially Trincomalee. SLDF calls on the Co-Chairs and India to support a UN human rights monitoring mechanism to be set up to rein in this pattern of human rights violations and to carry out investigations into thousands of such cases since the initiation of the peace process in 2002. The upcoming UN Human Rights Council meetings will provide a unique opportunity for the UN member states to address the human rights crisis in Sri Lanka. Indeed the credibility of the recently formed UN Human Rights Council - to which Sri Lanka was elected as member - is at stake depending on whether the UN member states will muster the courage to address the human rights crisis in Sri Lanka.

### **Permanent Political Solution**

Addressing humanitarian and human rights issues alone will not keep the peace agenda alive. Any sustainable and just peace will require a political solution that addresses the aspirations of both the Tamil and Muslim communities. As the Co-Chairs pointed out on 30 May 2006, the GOSL "must show that it is ready to make the dramatic political changes to bring about a new system of governance which will enhance the rights of all Sri Lankans, including the Muslims. The international community will support such steps; failure to take such steps will diminish international support." The Co-Chairs should solicit the support of India in pressuring the GOSL and the opposition political parties to move expeditiously on proposals for a permanent political solution. It should be reiterated that there is no military solution to the conflict in Sri Lanka, and only a political solution can address the aspirations of all the communities while safeguarding their human rights, humanitarian needs and economic development.

It is very clear today that the Sri Lankan State is not in a position to fulfill its international and national obligations to protect human rights and address humanitarian concerns of its citizens. The crisis facing Sri Lanka fundamentally reflects the failure on the part of its political elite to reform the State so as to address the political aspirations of all the peoples of Sri Lanka. The Co-Chairs in coordination with India, should as part of a reinvigorated peace process, actively develop a roadmap with concrete milestones to facilitate GOSL and the opposition political parties to reach a political consensus that will enable it to arrive at a permanent political solution.