

# *National Peace Council of Sri Lanka*

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## **Media Release 1**

### Abrogation of Ceasefire Agreement Will Escalate Spiral of Violence

The government has announced that it will abrogate the Norwegian-facilitated Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) signed with the LTTE in 2002 on account of the ground reality where conditions of continuing war and terror prevail. For the past two years the government and LTTE have been engaging in a high level of hostilities tantamount to war, including the overrunning of forward defense lines, capture of territory, artillery, sea and air bombing, and large scale displacement of people and violations of human rights.

The government's decision follows repeated demands by the JVP and other nationalist parties for the abrogation of the CFA. Government members have said that the peace process and political talks will continue with non-LTTE Tamil parties. While there is a need to include non-LTTE Tamil parties in political talks, it cannot be done at the cost of eliminating the LTTE from the dialogue. The danger inherent in the government's position, especially in the event of a total rejection of the past peace process with the LTTE, is that it is paving the way for a fight to the finish where the costs can be terribly high, success is not guaranteed, and no fall back position will be available.

It is also likely that the role played by the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) established under the CFA will also come to an end with the abrogation of the Ceasefire Agreement. Although the international monitors of the SLMM were unable to prevent acts of war and human rights violations from taking place, they were able to be physically present in the conflict zones and record incidents and report them to the conflicting parties and the international community. The Government's rejection of a UN Human Rights field presence, the inability of the Commission of Inquiry (COI) and the International Independent Group of Eminent Persons (IIGEP) to make meaningful progress in discharging their mandates, and the recent downgrading of the National Human Rights Commission, combine to place respect for human rights in Sri Lanka in further jeopardy.

The National Peace Council regrets that the abrogation of the CFA in the present circumstances will deprive the hapless civilians within the conflict zones with a credible authority to lodge complaints. This will also reduce the flow of credible information to the world outside. This lacuna will

constrain the work of human rights and peace groups who have been pressing the conflicting parties to address the issues of impunity and end the violations of human rights.

The National Peace Council is dismayed and deeply concerned at the situation in the country at the beginning of the New Year which has included the assassination of an opposition politician belonging to the largest opposition party who spoke of the agony of the Tamil people, the bombing of an army bus in the heart of Colombo that killed civilians and now by the abrogation of the CFA and the negation of the institutions it set up. We can only pray and hope that this period of war and terror will soon come to an end, and rationality and concern for human rights takes the conflicting parties back to the negotiating table and to end all armed hostilities, political assassinations and other criminal acts.

## **Media Release 2**

### War Against Terrorism is Leading to More Terror

The assassination of Colombo district Parliamentarian Thiagarajah Maheswaran inside a Hindu temple in Colombo on New Year's Day is a shocking manifestation of the utter disregard for civilised norms that has taken a grip over the country in the context of its civil strife. This killing was similar to the one carried out two years ago in a Catholic church in Batticaloa on Christmas day when Batticaloa district Parliamentarian Joseph Pararajasingham was assassinated.

The National Peace Council condemns the assassination of a politician who was dedicated to non-violent politics and who was a member of the multi ethnic and largest opposition party, the UNP. As a former Jaffna district Parliamentarian, he also had the courage to speak out publicly about the sufferings of the people of Jaffna, who are being subjected to a climate of terror in the present phase of the conflict in which extra judicial killings are taking place on a regular basis. In his last televised interview a few days ago, Mr Maheswaran said he would reveal details about the Jaffna situation in Parliament at its next sittings.

We should stress the fact that there is no accountability today in this country since not a single such assassination has led to the arrest and conviction of the murderers. A climate of killing with impunity has now taken hold. As the alleged perpetrator is in custody in hospital at present unlike in other cases, this provides an opportunity to identifying not only the one who carried out the assassination but also those who ordered this killing. Maximum security needs to be provided to him and an open and transparent investigation carried out and concluded without delay. Failure to do so would be a serious indictment on the government on its commitment to upholding the rule of law in practice.

The most important duty of a state is to enforce the law and bring to book those who violate the law. The failure of the Security Forces to apprehend perpetrators of so many recent instances of violence could cast reflection on their inefficiency and capability, while encouraging vigilantes to take action with impunity. These situations would strengthen and validate international pressure for a UN Human Rights monitoring field presence in the country.

We also express our concern at the government's practice of reducing the security provided to

politicians under threat and who have been critical of the government. Mr Maheswaran's security was reportedly reduced from 18 to 2 personnel last month. We note that Colombo district Parliamentarian Mano Ganeshan , who has championed the cause of the victims of human rights abuses especially the disappeared and the abducted, has appealed to the government to restore his security, and is now reportedly out of the country on account of the threats to his life.

The killing of democratic Tamil politicians is taking place alongside the government's attempt to militarily defeat the LTTE. Mr Maheswaran is the third Tamil parliamentarian to be assassinated in the past two years, along with Mr Pararajasingam and Mr Nadarajah Raviraj who represented the Jaffna district and was assassinated in Colombo. Investigations into both these assassinations have not led to any convictions by the government and remain inconclusive.

Several government leaders have described the New Year as being one of war in which terrorism will be finally defeated. However the remote controlled claymore mine attack on a military bus in the heart of Colombo's business area on the day following New Year's day, and the killing of at least four persons, three of whom were civilians, is an indication of the high price that the country will be called upon to pay. The National Peace Council condemns this suspected LTTE attack, especially as it was in a crowded civilian area, and could have led to many more fatalities to innocent life.

The violent incidents at the very beginning of the New Year are likely to be an indicator of worse to come not only in Colombo but also in the conflict zones of the north and east. The National Peace Council urges all parties involved in the conflict to ensure the protection of civilian lives by following the Geneva Conventions. We also reiterate our long standing call to the government and LTTE to stop the bloodshed and resolve the ethnic conflict through political means.

Executive Director  
On behalf of Governing Council