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USTPAC Remembers 30th Anniversary of “Black July”- A State-abetted Pogrom against Tamils in Sri Lanka

United States Tamil Political Action Council marks 30-yr anniversary of anti-Tamil violence in Sri Lanka, expresses concern over further deterioration and calls for international action to protect Tamils.

July 25, 2013: Washington, DC- This week Tamils living in the US and all over the globe somberly remember the dark days of “[Black July 1983](#),” a pogrom against the Tamils living in Sri Lanka, carried out by Sinhala mobs with total impunity and support of the Government of Sri Lanka. Over 3000 Tamils were killed, some burnt alive, women raped, and tens of thousands of Tamil homes and businesses destroyed. Even Tamil political prisoners detained in government prisons were not safe, 53 of them were murdered by Sinhala prisoners with the assistance of prison officials. Tens of thousands were evacuated to the relative safety of the North and East, the traditional homeland of Tamils.

While the triggering event was the killing of 13 army personnel by Tamil militants there is little doubt that the government helped plan and organize the violence. More disheartening was the tacit endorsement of the violence of the mobs by the then President of Sri Lanka, Mr. Jayawardene, who came on TV as the carnage was going on, not offering a word of sympathy to the victims, but justifying the violence as spontaneous reaction to Tamil political demands.

“While there is little doubt on government complicity in this massive crime, hope for the Tamils and for humanity was evident in the many Sinhala civilians who risked their own life protecting and safeguarding the lives of many Tamils,” said Dr. Elias Jeyarajah, President of USTPAC, whose close friend and colleague from University of Jaffna, Anthonipillai Vimalathanan was a victim on July 24, 1983. Mr. Vimalathanan was shot and killed by the rampaging military in Jaffna along with scores of civilians including elderly and students while travelling in buses or walking on the streets.

The Tamils fled the country in droves, and now a million of them live in freedom and dignity and contributing to their adopted countries. Another more tragic consequence was that a segment of the Tamils chose to support and strengthen the nascent armed struggle giving rise to the war in Sri Lanka which ended in May 2009, again with tens of thousands of innocent Tamil civilians killed, this time by the government’s Sinhala armed forces.

War may be over but the many conflicts and fault line in Sri Lanka remain. Now not only the Tamils but religious minorities, the Muslims and Christians too find their way of life being

constrained by Sinhala mobs often led by Buddhist monks who enjoy state protection. Churches have been burnt, and Mosques and Muslim businesses attacked with impunity. Tamils continue to be repressed by an intrusive army of occupation of their traditional homeland, their homes and property expropriated by the armed forces, and their freedoms substantially restricted. Yet their brave resistance to oppression being treated as second class citizens by the state continues, this time using peaceful political process and trusting the just impulses of the international community.

“While remembering the victims, I wonder what my friend Vimalathanan, an ardent rights activist, would have become, if his life was not snuffed out by Sri Lankan state terror thirty years ago,” pondered Dr. Jeyarajah. He then recalled the advice of [Eva Mozes Kor](#), a Holocaust survivor and one of the surviving twins of Dr. Mengele’s deadly experiments in Auschwitz. After participating in the laying of “one million bones” on Washington Mall on June 10th remembering victims of genocides, Kor stated: “Remembering is not enough; We must take all actions possible to stop and prevent Genocides such as in Sri Lanka today.”

USTPAC urges the international community of states to ensure that accepted international norms for governance and Human Rights become a reality in Sri Lanka. “The actions of the UN Human Rights council is a start, but it has to broaden its concern to investigating alleged war crimes, crimes against humanity including genocide of Tamils in the island of Sri Lanka” said Jeyarajah.

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