

**Tamils are held hostage in their own land says TULF leader
(Speech delivered by V. Anandasangaree, president of TULF, at the opening of
Call of the Conscience-a human rights art exhibit on the conflict in Sri Lanka-
held at Roy Thomson Hall in downtown Toronto, August 23, 2008.)**



Sri Lanka had been a peaceful country for generations, where the Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Burghers, Malays and people of other ethnic groups, lived in peace and harmony. During the late 70s and 80s, there had been a few upheavals, due to the violation of human rights, injustice, discrimination, exploitation and intolerance.

The victims were mainly Tamils and Muslims. Various Tamil groups cropped up as saviours of the Tamils and Muslims. Their fire- power could not stand against one group called the LTTE, which gradually either eradicated the other groups or silenced them with their fire-power and emerged as a single group committed to dictatorship. Championing the cause of the Tamils, they even drove every Muslim out of the Northern Province. The Muslims, merely because they are Muslims, had to leave behind all their possessions and the land where they lived peacefully with the Tamils for several generations. They are now languishing in refugee camps for more than 17 years in the south, with the Sinhalese, in Puttalam and Anuradhapura Districts, without privacy and their basic needs met. As long as refugee camps exist in our country, whether the inmates are Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims or of any other group, we have no moral rights to boast of democratic principles.

With one section of our people undergoing untold hardships, being deprived of their democratic fundamental and human rights, we can't boast of our country as one enjoying full democratic rights. Loss of democratic rights, fundamental rights and human rights amounts to slavery. Should our youth, be they Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims or of any other group, continue to shed their blood unnecessarily and die in vain at the battle front? I am convinced that the time has come for the country to find a solution reasonable enough and acceptable to the minorities and the international community.

It is no secret that the LTTE has now become so weak, but is still challenging not only the government of Sri Lanka but the entire international community as well. The Tamils are held hostage in their own land. Even the Tamils living freely in the south with the Sinhalese and those who fled the country and are being well looked after by various countries in the west, Canada and the United States, are living in fear and tension due to the threat of the LTTE.

Most of the Tamil media all over the world are under their control and are used by them to glorify all their actions and to condemn all their rival organisations and individuals opposed to them. Although the LTTE is banned in all the 28 countries of the European Union, UK, USA, Australia, India and more recently in Canada, they continue their activities unchecked in some of the countries where they are proscribed. Under the pretext of having a cultural program, even after it is banned, the LTTE hoodwinked the

Canadian authorities and celebrated 'Ponguthamil' recently in Toronto, at which even the Tiger flag was hoisted. It is understood that similar ceremonies were held on a large scale in Paris and on a smaller scale in the UK as well. It is obvious that although they are proscribed in those countries, some of them appear to be not in a mood to tighten their screws on the LTTE due to their dissatisfaction with the Sri Lankan government's slow action in putting forward a just and acceptable solution to the ethnic issue and some countries do so as a vote-catching device.

Several thousand innocent and unwilling Tamil youths from poor families were brainwashed and sent to the battlefield and as suicide bombers, to die. Most of them were children of poor parents recruited under compulsion and thoroughly brainwashed. The poor parents who are unable to challenge them are weeping in silence, while envying the fortunate children of the leaders of the LTTE having their education in western countries. The right of education is denied to children of poor parents.

A large number of Tamils belonging to various other groups, academics, teachers, government servants of all ranks have been shot dead. Apart from this, a few thousand Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and some from other minority groups have been killed in large explosions in trains, buses, the Central Bank and other important government buildings and over 30,000 army, navy, air force and police personnel in claymore mine attacks, hand grenade attacks, and a large number in the battlefield. In short, Prabhakaran should take the responsibility for the death of over 70,000 citizens of Sri Lanka and for the loss of limbs and eyesight of many. Thousands have become widows, orphans and destitute persons. Many of these victims are living on begging due to lack of a social support system.

Due to this, Prabhakaran has earned the very disgraceful title as the leader of the most ruthless terrorist organisation in the world. He also brought utter disgrace to the Tamil community - which is proud of its culture and civilization.

I expected Prabhakaran to show some sympathy towards the suffering Tamils of the North and East who are undergoing untold hardship more in the hands of his cadres than from anybody else. Twenty-five years of subjugation under his leadership has made the people to lose all confidence in him and in his cadres. The outside world is not aware of these atrocities that are going on behind the LTTE's 'Iron Curtain' area. Up to now, no one had refuted my charge that, in the areas under the control of the LTTE there are detention camps, dark room chambers, torture camps, abductions, killings, compulsory recruitments of children as child soldiers, the merciless assaulting of parents who resist conscription of children and many other such atrocious acts of the LTTE cadres. The people are so fed up that they want to run away from their homes into government-held areas, but they are driven further deep into the area under LTTE control and are often used as human shields.

The Tamil people who have been deprived of all their rights, including fundamental and democratic rights, as well as the right to live peacefully, are anxiously waiting to be liberated to enjoy the fruits of freedom and democracy. It may not be an exaggerated view, if I conclude by saying that the impact of a series of bans on the LTTE and the more recent policy decision of the government of Canada has weakened the LTTE. It

gives signals of early liberation of the people of northern Sri Lanka from the LTTE, the so-called liberators. To bring back democracy and peace to Sri Lanka, the government of Sri Lanka for its part should exonerate itself from the charge of human rights violations and without any further delay come out with a proposal for power devolution, acceptable to the minorities and the international community, which I believe is a Federal solution or in the alternative, a solution based on the Indian model, lest it loses its credibility.