



Canadian Tamil Congress
கனடியத் தமிழர் பேரவை
Congrès Tamoul Canadien
"The unified voice of Canadian Tamils"

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Tamil Canadians: Sri Lanka Descends Into Dictatorship

Community Calls for War Crimes Inquiry and Sanctions

Tamil Canadians strongly condemn the deterioration of democracy and the clampdown on dissent on the island of Sri Lanka as former top general and former presidential candidate Sarath Fonseka was arrested today in the country's capital, Colombo. As many Tamil Canadians have relatives and friends in Sri Lanka, the community fears for their well-being and future at the hands of this increasingly authoritarian leadership. Fonseka's arrest came after he vowed to give evidence before any war crimes tribunal. "I am prepared to go before any investigation and give evidence...I am not prepared to protect anyone, if they have committed war crimes. It is unpatriotic to protect anyone who has committed war crimes."

"The arrest of former presidential candidate Sarath Fonseka shows how far the leadership is willing to go to suppress the fact that war crimes were committed against the Tamil population," said David Poopalapillai, National Spokesperson for the Canadian Tamil Congress. The arrest also speaks to how quickly Sri Lanka is devolving into an authoritarian regime, in the likes of Burma and Iran.

"The international community's carrots and sticks approach to diplomacy with Sri Lanka is clearly failing with the government increasingly showing utter contempt for democratic principles and human rights," said Poopalapillai. "The Sri Lanka of today is an Orwellian one, where dissent is brutally repressed as human rights defenders, journalists and opposition politicians face death threats, disappearances or jail. Rajapaksa fits the mold of dictators like Saddam Hussein and Slobodan Milosevic when it comes to human rights and democracy."

"If the international community truly wants to promote genuine democracy, pluralism and human rights in Sri Lanka, it must seriously consider sanctions and embargoes against the country. Commonwealth countries such as Canada should take lead role in evicting Sri Lanka from Commonwealth as they did against Zimbabwe"

The arrest is the latest in a long list of undemocratic actions taken by the Sri Lankan government. Amnesty International earlier this month called the Sri Lanka government to immediately end its crackdown on journalists, political activists and human rights defenders after presidential election. The organization noted that opposition supporters and journalists had been arrested, several prominent newspaper editors had received death threats and trade unionists and opposition supporters had been harassed following the election.

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Amnesty also noted more than 100,000 Tamils remain illegally detained in government camps, despite assurances from officials they will be released. Others, it noted, faced restrictions on their freedom of movement upon leaving camps.

Human Rights Watch had also recently called on the Sri Lankan government to end its post-election harassment of media outlets and ensure protection of journalists from attack, noting several reporters had been detained and news websites blocked. The organization stated the Sri Lankan elections commissioner, Dayananda Dissanayake, has criticized the misuse of state media during the election. In his statement announcing the election results, he said he had issued specific guidelines for the state media that were "duly ignored."

The Canadian Tamil Congress (CTC) is a non-profit organization which serves as the voice of Tamil Canadians. Headquartered in Toronto, the CTC has 11 chapters across the country and an elected board of directors. The non-partisan organization works as the community's spokesperson on the municipal, provincial, federal and international levels.

For more information, contact the Canadian Tamil Congress at 416.240.0078 or 905.781.7034.

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