



CANADIAN TAMIL CONGRESS ■ CONGRÈS TAMOUL CANADIEN

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Canada's Response to Sri Lanka is Insufficient

Tamil Canadians are deeply troubled by Canada's policy towards the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka. Many Canadians have fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters in internment camps, where 280,000 civilians are confined in violation of international norms and laws. The recent monsoon downpours have exacerbated the situation for many civilians, flooding shelters and causing toilets to be submerged and water supplies to be contaminated with fecal matter in certain areas.

While Tamil Canadians welcome the increased aid to reputable humanitarian organizations, Canada's foreign policy towards Sri Lanka is falling behind other democratic nations, like the United States, Britain, France and Germany. Canada's actions have been lacking in holding the Sri Lankan government accountable for its internment of 280,000 civilians. The US recently publicly urged Sri Lanka to swiftly resettle the hundreds of thousands of Tamil civilians displaced by the war. Britain also recently publicly expressed its dissatisfaction with the treatment of Tamil civilians. Both countries, together with France, Germany and Argentina, abstained from a \$2.6 billion IMF loan to Sri Lanka mainly due to human rights concerns. However, Canada voted to approve this loan to Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, its vote will work to sustain a regime that is holding 280,000 civilians in barbed-wire camps, that represses and kills journalists, that bans human rights workers and independent observers from these camps.

"Despite the serious concerns repeatedly raised by the Tamil Canadian communities over the last three months, very little action has been taken by the Canadian government to hold Sri Lanka accountable for its blatant human rights violations," said Dr. Hector J Raj, the Halifax chapter coordinator for the Canadian Tamil Congress.



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“We urgently call upon the Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon and Prime Minister Stephen Harper to condemn the treatment of Tamils in these appalling, degrading camps, and demand that they be released immediately.”

Conditions are far from acceptable at these camps. A government presentation leaked to the Associated Press also noted more than 35 per cent of children under five are suffering from wasting, or acute malnutrition. Senior international aid sources have told The Times of London that about 1,400 people are dying weekly at Manik Farm.

“It must be remembered that these camp detainees are post-war victims,” said Dr. Raj. “They recently lost over 20,000 members of their kith and kin before they were herded into completely inadequate camps. Sadly, it appears that they have no one to speak for them.”

The IMF loan will come up for review again in a few months and Tamil Canadians urge the Canadian government not to side with a known human rights violator. Canada is urged to stand with fellow democratic nations, like Britain, France and the United States, and put pressure on Sri Lanka to free these detainees. The Canadian Tamil Congress calls for Canada to abstain or deny approving any more IMF funds to Sri Lanka while the relatives of thousands of its citizens suffer in modern-day internment camps.

For more information, contact Canadian Tamil Congress at 416.240.0078 or 902.229.5482