

RESPONSES AND REPLIES TO THE PRESS RELEASE Issued on 14 March 2000

Congratulations SHAKTHI, your Press release is very welcomed. Please do continue your good work. We need a middle ground thinking in this protracted conflict of our land.

S. H.

Dear Shakthi,

The lesson to be learnt is that you cannot wage war in the North-East and expect it not to spill over to the South. That is not possible and Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe too agrees. The government and the army only had the taste of their own medicine. As you have correctly identified, the Tamils in the north and east are going through similar sort of killings almost every day but, the government and the army claims that they have killed number of terrorists and unfortunately many Sinhalese accept it without any question. But, when it happens in the south lots of people get to know about it, talk about it and those killers becomes suicide bombers and the victims all becomes civilians. Most of the Sinhalese (including Shakthi) think that this terrible ethnic war has brought only refugee problem to Tamils and suicide bombing problem to Sinhalese. The truth is there is a lot more than a refugee problem to Tamils.

P.

Reply from "Shakthi"

Dear P.,

Your point that the Sinhalese cannot expect to continue the war in the north without suffering its consequences is taken and taken well. However, we cannot agree with your judgement that "Shakthi" like all Sinhala organisations, is only truly worried about the atrocities committed in the South.

Our basic point in the press release was that the LTTE's actions, coming at a time when the suffering masses in the island were beginning sense a possibility for peace in the Norwegian efforts, raised questions about the LTTE's commitment to the peace process for the simple reason that it had the potential to alienate a large section of the population in the south, just as government repression - against which we have spoken incessantly - alienates peace-loving people in the North and the East. What is needed now, we believe, is to capitalise on the revitalised hope for peace in the masses rather than increase their despair and gloom. It is from that perspective that we viewed the LTTE's actions, not from the perspective of a "Sinhala organisation" showing particular sensitivity to the suffering of the South.

It is indisputable that it is the people in the North and the East who have suffered most in this war. One way to ease this suffering and move the conflict towards a peaceful resolution is for people who are genuinely interested in ending it is to prevail on Sinhala and Tamil leadership to act with sense, foresight, and humanity towards all peoples in Sri Lanka.

Accepting without question everything Velupillai Prabhakaran and the LTTE do and hastily and imprudently branding us just another Sinhala organisation brings

you no credit and will only reduce you to the level of the Sinhala extremists who blindly defend everything the Sri Lankan government does and labels all dissenters as "LTTE stooges". It is action based on such simplistic reasoning that has earned the LTTE's agenda the tag of "fascism". How sad that many LTTE sympathisers wear it like a badge of honour!

**Regards
Shakthi.**

To - President - Media enquires.

In the last paragraph of your media release you call upon LTTE and the government to start the process of negotiations; Anyone with iota of political knowledge knows that the government is ready and willing, and president herself is willing to lead delegations. Therefore you need to now call upon mindless LTTE and ruthless Prabhakaran to come forward, otherwise you are barking at the wrong tree.

You talk about democratic rights of the Tamil people and their right to defend politically and militarily. I believe you are sadly mistaken if you think that the LTTE is fighting militarily to defend the democratic rights of Tamil people; my question to you - why are those barbarians killing Tamil political leaders and their own people. In my opinion I assume, either you are blind or pretend that you are blind or are you another front for LTTE?

However I would like to know your name and whose human rights are you trying to protect?

**Cheers,
R. W.(Melbourne Youth)**

Reply from "Shakthi"

Dear Mr. W.,

We received your reply to our press release and read it with amusement.

This is all we have to say in response:

It is true that the Sri Lankan government has been calling for negotiations. It is also true that the LTTE also has been calling for negotiations for a very long time. It is just that we cannot think of any one time when both sides were prepared to negotiate. We can also recall the many unreasonable conditions put forward by both sides as a pre-requisite for negotiations (eg. withdrawal of troops, laying down arms) which were clearly designed to elicit a negative response from the other side. All this simply shows that both sides are only interested in pursuing a military solution behind a facade of a willingness to negotiate, hence our call for BOTH sides to enter into negotiations.

However, your childish and irrational eagerness to defend the Sri Lankan government suggests that this type of rational explanation carries no weight with you. You, just like many sympathisers of the LTTE, seem to believe that the YOUR side can never do any wrong - it is always the OTHER side that violates cease fires, kills civilians and refuses to negotiate. We can only offer them our sympathies.

**sympathetically,
Shakthi**

To whom it may concern,

I write following receipt of this disturbing message from your organisation. I do not know who you are trying to impress with the statement, "The Tamil people have every right to defend their democratic rights politically and militarily" because if you are attempting to help our country, Sri Lanka, in any way, you could not have caused greater damage.

To set the facts straight, let me say that before 1983, 4% of Jaffna's population were Sinhalese - today, there is not one Sinhalese man, woman or child in the city nor its outskirts, yet you have the audacity to say that the "Tamils" have a right to defend their democratic rights militarily! Does this "legitimate" military campaign include race based attacks on numerous civilians and Buddhist clergy in the vicinity of the Northern and Eastern Provinces over the last 20 years? This explicit form of ethnic cleansing has been carried out only by the LTTE terrorists (not all Tamils, but a few extremists), and yet you say they are justified in their means! Furthermore, does this "legitimate" military campaign also justify the slaying of democratically elected Tamil politicians? If so, you seem to be confused because you equate the LTTE's military campaign with democracy, yet this very military campaign eliminates any person elected democratically by the Tamil people!

Let me point out, since you obviously do not know yourself, that a vast segment of the Tamil population live in the "south" (as you put it) and live in perfect peace and harmony with the Sinhala and Muslim people. Our constitution gives equal rights to every citizen of Sri Lanka, irrespective of race, religion or creed. Compare that to say Malaysia, (where explicit advantages are given to their Bhumiputra culture with minorities being forced to take a second class status) - a country where you may have had a point in what you say. Our people, (Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim) may have made mistakes in the past, however these have been accepted and subsequently rectified in our constitution, and today, this document stands as probably the most tolerant constitution in the world. Despite this you endorse the military carnage that is destroying our country both economically and socially!

I do not know who you or your members are, but let me tell you that if your aim is to help Sri Lanka - your country of birth, the country that gave you your free education and gave you all the opportunities to come to Australia, you are gravely misguided. I hope that your members take this message to heart for I am utterly disgusted at your endorsement of the LTTE and their acts of violence against the people of Sri Lanka (be it Sinhala, Tamil or Muslim) and therefore wish to be taken off your distribution list and to never hear from you or your cult of naive and imprudent wanderers who are quite obviously desperately seeking their lot in life.

S. A.

Reply from "Shakthi"

Dear Mr. A.,

We received your arrogant and pompous reply to our press release. Your request to be taken off the mailing list will be respected, but not before you hear what we have to say!

It is not difficult to see why the you are disturbed by the assertion that "Tamils have a right to defend themselves militarily", and is enamoured with the Sri Lankan Constitution. Your reply clearly shows that you have no understanding of democracy - or the role of a Constitution.

The Tamil people, it must be noted, took arms ONLY after the failure of their peaceful (and democratic) efforts to present their demand for their democratic right of self-determination. All peaceful efforts were met with condescension and force, leaving sections of the Tamil community with no alternative but to take up arms. The government's response to this took the form of the use of massive military force in areas dominated by the Tamil minority, creating horrendous loss of life and property. (Contrary what the writer claims, there are many Sinhalese - in fact thousands of them - now in Jaffna and they are all wearing military uniforms!) The Tamil insurgency, now headed by the LTTE, developed in tune with the military onslaught and has now come to represent, to many Tamils all over the world, the only effective defence against the suppression of their democratic right of self-determination. As such, military action taken to counter the Sri Lankan army's assault upon the north and the east of the Island can be taken as an expression of the Tamil people's democratic right to defend themselves and their homeland against military aggression. We have no quarrel with that. However, we take strong exception to all attempts at ethnic cleansing and the deliberate targeting of civilians of all ethnic groups in any part of the island in the name of self-determination, which in our opinion, only leads to further erosions of basic human rights of all peoples in Sri Lanka and strengthen the forces of reaction and repression. Hence the press release.

A few words about Tamil grievances and Constitutions: If the rights enjoyed by a people can be measured by the rights guaranteed by the Constitution of a country, the people who lived under Josef Stalin must have been the happiest people on earth! Stalin guaranteed them every conceivable right but his regime was also responsible for the deaths of millions of men, women and children under the most horrific conditions. Many of them were the victims of purges and witch hunts, none of which was provided for by the Constitution. You must remember that July '83 occurred when your beloved Constitution was well in place in Sri Lanka and when the Island was ruled by a regime which claimed to have the power to do everything except make a man a woman and vice versa. Yet, for almost a week, mobs were allowed to rampage through the streets of Colombo, killing defenceless Tamils and burning and looting their property while the all-powerful government did nothing to protect the citizens it has pledged to protect with its Constitution.

Again, in '87 - '90, death squads roamed much of the island violating all the wonderful clauses about human rights and liberties, piling corpse upon corpse by roadsides. The Constitution did not help the Tamils in '83 and the Sinhala youth in '87-'90. It doesn't still help them. It is interesting to note what Dr. Colvin R. de

Silva, said during the parliamentary debate in 1956, of the "Sinhala Only" Bill. "if the bill is passed, two torn little bleeding states may yet arise out of one little state...One language, two countries; two languages, one country."

S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike - reg. B-C pact in 1956 ..."If you (Sinhala nationalists) want I will tear up this agreement, but all of you will suffer its consequences in 20 years. Today all Sri Lankans are going through the suffering they predicted and paying for those sins.

You say Tamils are living in the South, in "perfect peace and harmony with the Sinhala and Muslim people". Yes, the Tamils in Colombo enjoy a measure of peace in the south because the presence of the local and foreign media imposes limits to what the security forces can do with impunity to curtail their freedom. On the contrary, the media is allowed into the North and the East only when the government conducts "guided tours". As a result the horrendous conditions under which hundreds of thousands of refugees live in the Vanni and the casual violence visited upon civilians in military-controlled areas has been concealed from the world. This is a disturbing situation unparalleled in modern history, something which rarely happens even in countries with far less liberal constitutions than Sri Lanka. Even in the south, what of the regular raids and check points that harass and humiliate Tamils for no other reason than their being Tamils? What of the mass arrests and humiliating processes of photographing that violates the government's own procedures for arrest and detention? You probably blame it all on the "terrorists". But aren't these people supposed to be protected by the Constitution regardless of "terrorism"? Or is the Constitution irrelevant in the face of a terrorist problem (as happened in '83 and '87-'90)? If so, is it a Constitution that is worth bragging so much about? Constitutions are good for people whose biggest problem in life is a hangover from a Friday night bash. To those who are engaged in a daily struggle for survival, the Constitution is a sheaf of papers with lots of irrelevant and often offensive jokes written on them.

There, A., now you can have your little email address back. Now eat all your porridge and go to school and if you be a good boy, santa will bring you a nice little Constitution, equal rights and all!

Shakthi

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