

RESPONSES AND REPLIES TO THE PRESS RELEASE Issued on 11 January 2000

Subject: Your Press Release

President

People for Human Rights and Racial Equality

I am writing to you with reference to your recent statement. As a peace-loving citizen of Sri Lanka, I cannot help being concerned about the activities of your organisation since your statement sounds a bit "LTTE-sympathising" to me. At one point you say " LTTE should immediately stop the violence against non-military targets" -Well, this seems to imply that the LTTE may continue violence against the Sri Lankan forces who are trying to protect our country from these terrorists. The worse is, you say that LTTE should stop killing civilians BECAUSE "Such acts play into the hands of the racists among the Sinhalese, and provide excuses for such forces to justify acts of terror and violence against Tamil civilians" - this sounds like you're trying to protect the image of the LTTE. If you are sincerely concerned about the peace in Sri Lanka, then you should be loudly condemning LTTE violence against innocent Sinhalese & Muslim civilians. It is really unfortunate that innocent, peace-loving Tamil civilians are subject to security scrutiny which some times leads to trouble. However, you should understand that it is crucial for the security forces to carry out the necessary checks to assure security especially around Colombo and this should not be considered as human rights violation. You talk so much about the human rights of the Tamil people, but you don't mention a thing about those thousands of Sinhalese villagers who have been killed, become orphans, become homeless due to the acts of the Tamil terrorists- who talks about their human rights? Don't misunderstand me, I am a firm believer of equal rights for all citizens irrespective of their racial background. Unfortunately, most are blind to the fact the injustice in Sri Lanka is against the poor and the powerless, not against Tamils. Poor Tamils suffer in the North, and poor Sinhalese suffer in the South -the difference? there is no one to talk about the latter group.

So, isn't it time to have a good look at the situation in Sri Lanka and to understand the need to uproot terrorism from that unfortunate country? Despite the fact that politics and the armed forces are far from being clean, we should support those who have a genuine interest in people of Sri Lanka and saving the country from LTTE terrorism.

I think you should open your eyes towards the majority Sinhalese who are suffering too, instead of just branding them as racists.

Yours Sincerely,

P. B.

Reply from "Shakthi"

Thank you for responding to our press release. We welcome your comments even though it is obvious that we do not see eye to eye with you about many issues relating to the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka.

We would like to explain our position on a number of points raised by you regarding our press release. First, the press release was issued to inform our

concerns about the recent developments in Sri Lanka, it doesn't mean to explain our position about LTTE or other organisations etc. Also we didn't mean to explain how the war has affected the South and the border villages etc. But we have been explaining our position on these issues quite clearly on our weekly radio program and by other means, public meetings, news paper articles etc. The main difference between your position and ours seems to be that in your opinion there has been no injustice caused to Tamil people living in the N.E. of Sri Lanka. You are generalising things by saying that the injustice was against the poor in the South & the North. You also say that peace cannot be achieved without wiping out terrorism.

It should be pointed out that the poor southern youths you are talking about had waged a terrorist campaign similar to that of the LTTE in the South in late 80's. What did the so-called Sinhala leaders do to these Sinhala Buddhist youths. Were they concerned about the injustice done to them? Were they worried about wiping out an entire Sinhala generation? In fact these leaders joined with the security forces to wipe out these youths as well as the other politicians who were against their political ideology. When these youths were brutally murdered by the so called patriotic army, what did these academics and the others who talk about poor Sinhalese do? Did they speak a single word against it? In fact what they are openly saying now is LTTE should be wiped out in the same way that the JVP was wiped out.

History has proven that the terrorism can not be wiped out unless root causes to the problems are addressed (eg. . IRA, PLO, ANC) . The JVP is the best example in Sri Lanka. Although they were defeated twice and wiped out in late 80's by killing their entire leadership, they have come up stronger than ever before. So it is obvious so called Sinhala leaders are just talking about these poor Sinhalese in the South in order to justify their racist agenda.

Don't you think the people who destroy democracy in the country and push under-privileged youths to the guillotine are terrorists as well? What about the corrupt politicians who involved in arms-deals, bribery, selling off all our assets including lands etc to multi national companies. Aren't they criminals too? So called Sinhala leaders who are worried about poor Sinhalese, what they are doing about it ? Have they at least expressed their concern about these matters ?

We think that peace cannot be achieved by just condemning LTTE or wiping out LTTE, unless the real problems & concerns of the Tamil people living in the North & East of Sri Lanka are addressed. The people who say it is just a terrorist problem and Tamils haven't been treated unfairly are the people who push all the Tamils in to the hands of LTTE. People who really love the country and concerned about the ordinary people are the ones who demand immediate stop to this bloody war based on a just & fair political solution. It's the only way to fight LTTE and marginalise them locally as well as internationally. People who demand war are ultimately helping the corrupt politicians on both sides to sell off all the assets of our country to foreign powers in the name of the war and make us slaves in our own country.

Why we say LTTE should stop violence against civilians:

As both [parties](#) involved in the war are not interested in negotiating for a political solution, and continuing the war for their short term political interests we are demanding at least to stop violence against innocent civilian if they are to continue the war. It does not mean that it's all right to destroy everything other than civilians. But it's the least demand we could make if they are not prepared to stop this bloody war.

You are asking us to open our eyes to the majority Sinhalese instead of branding them as racist. I think you have misunderstood our point. The majority Sinhalese have never been racist. That's why the majority of people support a political solution to this problem. All the opinion polls and the recent election results has proven this. The culprits are the power-hungry corrupt politicians not the ordinary people.

We hope we have made our position clear to you. Once again we thank you for responding and we hope to hear from you in the future. We apologise for taking so long to reply. Ours is a small organisation of ordinary people who grapple with their day to day lives while trying to do something about what we think is right.

Shakthi

My dear Channa,

I read your press release.

I have been reading press releases, news, debates, talks publishings, arguments, pages and pages of articles, notes on conferences, you name it from all types of Societies, organisations, movements, for and against terrorism from all parts of the Globe over the past ten to fifteen years. I am sure you would have too. BUT has any one come up with a viable solution, I mean a viable one.

Is war the solution ?

Is division the solution ?

Give all what they ask is the solution ?

Is extermination the solution ?

I have seen societies and movements come up like mushrooms. You know what they all ask for. We need funds, we need funds, we need funds. Please help.

Please help. Recently I went to

the latest movement i.e. Sinhala Veera Vidhana Movement. Have you ? What I gathered was that, in Tamil speaking areas Sinhala schools are neglected, the roads are not maintained, and the singhala students have to get 250 marks whereas Tamil students need only 150 marks to get into the Universities etc. So what I gathered was that Singhala families are forced out of those areas to give their children a better education, in which process another Tamil family comes into that area.

What they say is before long Muslims and Tamils have their partitions fenced.

They don't have a solution either. What they are trying to do is to show the world the same old conflict in a differnt angle and they need help too for this.

So what's the solution for this.

I am a Buddhist. I have a firm belief that Lord Buddha found a solution to stop the cycle of birth. He looked into the cause of rebirth.

I think' here we have to take this as an example, and look back and see what caused this rift, anger, hatred, division, breakup and look for a solution for this never ending war to tear up the country.

I don't think there is an immediate solution for this conflict. Even if you divide the country into three and say O.K. you can have this portion, you can have this portion, and we will live like brothers and sisters will it work ? It took over 40 years to come to this and I think even if we find a viable solution it will take another 50 years to see the results.

Any way I would like to hear from you if you too have a solution for this and I will come up with mine at a later stage.

Cheers !!

P.

Reply from "Shakthi"

Dear Patrick,

Thanks very much for responding to our press release. We welcome all comments and appreciate all points of view.

You have raised a number of points in your email and due to time constraints we are unable to address them all. However, we would like to say something about the most pertinent question posed by you: do we have solution? We do not believe it is up to us to offer a solution, which should ideally come from the people who are responsible for the carnage in Sri Lanka. However, we also realise that it would be hypocritical for us to talk about peace in Sri Lanka without having some idea of how to bring it about. To that end we feel that a lasting peace between the Sinhalese and the Tamils in Sri Lanka can only be achieved if the government of Sri Lanka puts forward proposals that genuinely addresses the main concern of the Tamil people -their right of self-determination (that is their right to separate from as well as integrate with the state of Sri Lanka) - and start discussions with the LTTE and other Tamil parties on the basis of that principle. We are aware that many Sinhala people have a problem with trusting and negotiating with the LTTE but we feel that such scepticism will be more justified if any Sri Lankan government has yet made a genuine attempt to recognise the Tamil people's right for self-determination. Without the genuine recognition of that fundamental right negotiations with the LTTE and peace in Sri Lanka is bound for a very rocky road. No amount of high-tech weaponry will be able to change that. On the other hand, if an attempt is made to devolve power on the basis of a genuine recognition of the Tamil people' s right of self-determination, Mr. Prabhakaran will find it extremely difficult to convince his people that they have to suffer some more for dignity and self-respect.

We must also point out that although we recognise the Tamil people's right to separate we do not advocate separation. Not because we think that Sri Lanka is the property of the Sinhala Buddhists but because we feel that separation without amity and friendship between the two nations is a sure way to mutual destruction and that it is only in an environment of enmity that separation becomes necessary (after all, why do you wish live separately if there is friendship?). The challenge today is to rebuild the already badly hurt friendship between the Tamils and Sinhalese on a basis of equality rather than the generosity of the Sinhalese

and the vulnerability of the Tamils. A genuine attempt to recognise Tamil concerns will go some distance in achieving that.

As for PHRRE being another mushroom organisation, we would like to think of ourselves as an organisation with solid principles rather than something something set up by a group of individuals looking for attention and a diversion. However, we do not blame anybody for lumping us with all other mushroom organisations. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish trees from mushrooms these days! Whether we are a strong organisation with staying power will be determined by our principles and how we stand by them under pressure. The same goes for the Sinhala Veera Vidhana.

As for funds, yes, we are short of money, but we will never beg or steal to fund ourselves. This is an organisation of run by ordinary people in the midst of their daily struggles to exist. We are very proud of that.

Once again, we thank you for responding to us. Our apologies for being so late with our reply. We welcome any further comments and queries from you and hope you will continue to show an interest in what we do, even if you may not agree with us.

**With best wishes,
Shakthi.**

From: Suniti.Bandaranaike

Subject: Press Release - PHRRE

Thank you for forwarding the Press Statement. I would certainly support the statement made by Phree. Congratulations on taking the initiative to form the support group.

Best wishes

Suniti Bandaranaike.

Reply from "Shakthi"

Dear Sunithi,

Thank you for taking the time to respond to our press release. Your comments and support are very welcome. It is good to hear from people like you, to say the least.

We look forward to hearing more from you in the future. If you need to know more about our group, please let us know.

Our sincere apologies for being so late with our reply. We will try to be more prompt in the future.

**kind regards,
Shakthi**