

**PRESS RELEASE**

Text of the D.O.Letter dated 7.7.2016 of **Selvi J Jayalalithaa**, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu addressed to **Shri Narendra Modi**, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India :-

"I write to strongly reiterate my earlier exhortations for an early, permanent and peaceful solution to the livelihood issue affecting lakhs of fishermen from Tamil Nadu living along the coast bordering the Palk Bay. The apprehension, arrest, and incarceration of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy continues unabated and in the latest instance, 16 Indian fishermen in 3 mechanised fishing boats from Rameswaram fishing base in Ramanathapuram District have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hours of 7.7.2016 and taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka. With this the total number of fishermen in Sri Lankan custody has reached 73.

The unconstitutional ceding of the Indian territory of Katchatheevu Island by the agreements of 1974 and 1976 has been challenged by me on valid legal grounds in the Supreme Court of India. The Government of Tamil Nadu subsequently impleaded itself in this case. The stand of the Government of Tamil Nadu is that the International Maritime Boundary line (IMBL) with Sri Lanka cannot be treated as settled by the Government of India as the matter is sub-judice. I reiterate that only the retrieval of Katchatheevu will restore to our fishermen the right to peacefully earn their livelihood by fishing in their traditional waters of the Palk Bay and thereby permanently resolve this vexatious issue.

What is particularly distressing is that the Sri Lankan authorities have been unrelenting in their strategy of not releasing the fishing boats and gear and thereby greatly impairing the meagre livelihood of our poor fishermen. The prolonged disuse of the fishing craft and gear and lack of care and maintenance will make them unusable and unseaworthy, compounding the financial losses of the poor fishermen and reducing them to economic ruin. Hence, I strongly urge the Government of India to secure the release, at the earliest, of the fishing boats and their return in a refurbished condition to our fishermen.

I have repeatedly emphasized the importance of the Government of India undertaking a strong diplomatic offensive to uphold the rights and interests of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu. I once again seek your urgent directions to the Ministry of External Affairs to initiate measures to find a permanent solution to this livelihood issue of our fishermen. I also request your personal intervention to secure the immediate release of the 73 fishermen and 101 fishing boats, including the 16 fishermen and their 3 fishing boats apprehended on 7.7.2016, from Sri Lankan custody. I urge that there should be strong and decisive action by the Government of India in this matter and the present situation cannot be allowed to fester in this manner."

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**Issued by: Director, Information and Public Relations, Chennai – 9.**