

PRESS RELEASE

Text of the D.O. letter dated 25.3.2013 addressed by **Selvi J Jayalalithaa**, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu to **Dr. Manmohan Singh**, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India is reproduced below:

"You would recall that I had written to you on 18th March, 2013, conveying the deep sense of outrage amongst Tamils all over the world and particularly, in Tamil Nadu, over the issue of war crimes and genocide perpetrated against Sri Lankan Tamils by the Sri Lankan army in the closing stages of the civil war. There are also continuing instances of human rights abuses against the Tamils in Sri Lanka, who continue to be ostracized as second class citizens in their own land.

There was considerable and broad based support for a strong resolution condemning Sri Lanka for the genocide and asking for an independent, international mechanism to investigate those accused of war crimes and genocide and to bring them to book. I had suggested that India should not only support the US moved resolution but should also move amendments to further strengthen the resolution. As it transpired, India voted in favour of a diluted and weak resolution moved by the US and did not move any amendments to condemn the genocide or to urge the establishment of an independent, international inquiry into the war crimes. There was widespread disappointment at this stand of the Government of India and a continuing sense of injustice in Tamil Nadu on this issue.

In the meanwhile, it is reported that the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) and the Leaders' Retreat is proposed to be held in Colombo from 15th to 17th November, 2013. In the present context, holding such a high profile international event, which will be attended by heads of government from across the world would amount to endorsing the present regime in Sri Lanka, which stands accused of committing genocide, war crimes and ongoing human rights abuses against Sri Lankan Tamils. This regime, which continues to deny Tamils their legitimate human rights, equality and democratic freedom, far from upholding Commonwealth values, has clearly violated the central credo of the Commonwealth, which is democracy and human rights. Nations have been suspended from the Commonwealth for far less.

Mr. Prime Minister, the proposed CHOGM in Colombo is another opportune occasion for India to mount further pressure on Sri Lanka to ensure that accountability is established under an international framework for the war crimes and genocide committed in the closing stages of the civil war and the ongoing gross human rights abuses. In the light of the fresh, mounting evidence of atrocities committed by the Sri Lankan military the Conference presents another opportunity to secure for Sri Lankan Tamils equal constitutional rights and a life of dignity. India must play a crucial role in this regard, given not only the deep and widespread sentiment prevailing amongst all sections of society and shades of political opinion in Tamil Nadu, as well as at the national level by many Opposition parties, but also the need to establish India as a global leader standing up for democracy and human rights.

It has also been widely reported that Canada has already indicated that it is likely to boycott the CHOGM in Colombo over the issue of gross human rights violations of the Sri Lankan Government. The House of Commons Committee on Foreign Affairs in the United Kingdom has also urged the British Prime Minister not to attend the CHOGM in Colombo. Clearly, many important countries across the world, including two G-8 countries, propose to leverage the proposed CHOGM in Sri Lanka and make substantial progress in human rights issues in Sri Lanka.

As an emerging great power and an aspirant for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council, India has a duty to ensure that the values of democracy and respect for human rights are upheld anywhere in the world and in particular in its neighbourhood. As a leader in South Asia, India is uniquely positioned to exert the maximum influence on the Sri Lankans to accept an independent international mechanism to hold those who committed genocide and war crimes to account.

Mr. Prime Minister, there is still time to consider even an alternative venue to hold the event. India should use this opportunity to ask that the venue for the CHOGM be shifted to another country. If India takes this diplomatic initiative there is likely to be broad based support amongst member countries of the Commonwealth.

In any event, any high level participation or engagement from the Indian side in the CHOGM will not only embolden the Sri Lankan regime but also incense public opinion and sentiment in Tamil Nadu on this very sensitive issue even further. I would, therefore, strongly urge you not to attend the CHOGM and the Leaders' Retreat proposed to be held in Colombo on November 15 to 17, 2013.

Mr. Prime Minister, I write to you in the hope and expectation that the Government of India will decisively step forward as a true champion of human rights and democracy and will launch a strong diplomatic initiative in support of the much discriminated against and long suffering Tamil minority in Sri Lanka. At the very least, India must stay away from the CHOGM to be held in Colombo and, thereby, exert pressure on Sri Lanka to do justice by its hapless, much exploited Tamil Minorities. By doing so, India would also demonstrate its empathy and solidarity with the millions of Tamils both in Tamil Nadu and elsewhere and assuage the legitimate sense of outrage amongst them against Sinhala excesses against Sri Lankan Tamils."

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