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PETITION TO THE STATE GOVERNMENT OF TAMIL NADU

Special relationship between Tamil Nadu and Eelam Tamils should be reflected in treatment of refugees

For years Tamil Nadu has served as the first point of sanctuary for Eelam Tamils fleeing genocide in their homeland. Detention in camps out of bounds for non governmental organisations and independent media have long strained the otherwise special relationship between Tamil Nadu and Eelam Tamils. The case of 25 refugees locked up in the Chengalpet 'special camp' and the ongoing hunger strike by 12 of the detainees should provide an urgency for the current government of Tamil Nadu state to reevaluate its policy towards Eelam Tamil refugees.

More than 200, 000 Eelam Tamils fleeing genocide in their homeland by the occupying Sri Lankan military have sought sanctuary in Tamil Nadu. For decades, these people have been detained in government run camps in coastal towns; they have been accorded minimal rights.

Most disturbing are the existence of 'special camps' such as Chengalpet and Poonthamalli, where refugees are detained indefinitely as prisoners without trial. Often these are young men accused of belonging to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), but without any evidence to prove such allegations. The ongoing hunger strike by 12 people held at Chengalpet is a poignant reminder of the existence of these 'zero rights zones' beyond the reach of national and international laws.

India is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, nor does it have a national refugee protection framework.

The current government of Tamil Nadu has been vocal in its opposition to the genocide of the Eelam Tamil nation in its historic homeland. Further, actions such as politico-economic boycotts of Sri Lanka have helped strengthen the special relationship between Tamil Nadu and Eelam Tamils. Many in Tamil Nadu government have also openly expressed their informed assessment that the genocide can only be halted by international assistance to the Eelam Tamil nation to exercise sovereignty over its traditional homeland.

Eelam Tamils and their friends gathered outside the High Commission of India in London on Tuesday, 03 July 2012, urge the government of Tamil Nadu state to take brave measures in addressing Eelam Tamil refugees, beginning with the immediate closure of all 'special camps'. In the absence of a national refugee protection framework in India, the state should develop robust mechanisms to ensure refugees are accorded similar sets of rights as by countries that are party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol.

Signed

Tamil Coordinating Committee United Kingdom