

Loss of the Tamil Homeland

Identifying issues and creating strategies to preserve Tamil Land

**2021 March 20th at 12.30 pm London Time; 6 pm Colombo Time and 8.30 am
Toronto Time**

Zoom Meeting ID – 925 7244 2450

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Opening Speech by Justice C.V.Wigneswaran

Guru Brahma.....

Hello Everybody!

It is A.M in Canada, Noon in Britain and P.M in Sri Lanka. Hence I am not greeting you in reference to the meridian. Transcending the meridian let me welcome sincerely from the bottom of my heart each and every one of you to this important Zoom Conference.

My friends in UK and elsewhere have done a marvelous job in organizing this Zoom Conference. My initial idea before Covid 19 struck us, was to have an internal Seminar either in Mullaithivu, Vavuniya or Trincomalee to discuss Land Grabbing taking place mainly in those districts. Covid 19 completely changed the scenario. Then my friends abroad, suggested an International E – Conference. After much hard work here we are today together ready to participate at this Conference though living in different parts of this Globe.

Every one of my indefatigable colleagues deserve our thanks and laudations.

It is appropriate that we have Hon' Rajavarodayam Sambandan, a Senior Member of Parliament, indeed the oldest in Parliament today, Veteran Politician, Leader of the Tamil National Alliance and the former Leader of the Opposition of the Parliament of Sri Lanka joining us to inaugurate this important event which discusses the loss of the Tamil Homeland identifying issues in this regard and creating strategies to preserve Tamil Land. I am happy the one who brought me into politics determined and doggedly is inaugurating this Conference with me.

I welcome the eminent Keynote Speakers who have consented to participate in this historical Conference. We have Dr.Navaneetham Pillai, Former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, we have Madam Cherie Blair CBE, QC. Founder of Omnia Strategy LLP and Mr.David Matas CM, 2010 Nobel Peace Prize nominee and Member of the Order of Canada, all of whom I wholeheartedly and thankfully welcome. It is indeed our privilege to have them as our Keynote speakers today.

Then we have the Panelists participating in the four Panel sittings. We have Anuradha Mittal of the Oakland Institute, USA, we have Wiley Nickel, State Senator of North Carolina, USA, we have Dr.Ibrahim Seaga Shaw, Chairman and Information Commissioner of the Rights to Access Information Commission in Sierra Leone, we have our own Bhavani Fonseka, Senior Researcher of the Centre for Policy Alternatives, Sri Lanka, we have my friend and College mate Dr.M.Sornarajah, Emeritus Professor of Law, National University of Singapore, we have Dr.V.Nithiyanandam, Retired Professor of Economics, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka presently living in New Zealand, then we have Dr.Thamil Ananthavinayagan, Teaching Associate in International Human Rights Law, University of Nottingham, UK, we have Veronika Pavlovskaya, Senior Associate, Arzinger Law Firm, Belarus, we have Mr.Kathirgamathamby Kurunathan, former

Land Commissioner, Sri Lanka, now retired and living in Batticaloa, East of Sri Lanka, we have Lorenzo Fiorito, Human Rights Advisor, Fundraising Co – ordinator, British Tamil Conservatives who has been very helpful to me, then we have Sowjeya Joseph, Lawyer and Diaspora Activist, UK, who too has been of immense help to me, then we have Mr.K.S.Ratnavel, Senior Attorney at Law and Director of the Centre for Human Rights and Development, Sri Lanka, we have Mr.R.T.Vignarajah former High Court Judge, Jaffna, Sri Lanka, a former student of mine at Ceylon Law College, we have His Holiness Velan Swamigal an Engineer by Profession and now a Hindu Swami who led the P2P of the People’s Uprising Movement, Sri Lanka, we have Dr.Kandiah Sarveswaran former Minister of Northern Provincial Council, Sri Lanka and we have Kabilini Ratnasingham from UK, Abiramy Logeswaran from US, Eelavan Karikalan from Switzerland, Barbara Vencilas from UK and Dr Kumuthini Kunaratnam from Canada representing the Youth. I welcome all of you wholeheartedly.

The Tamils of Sri Lanka are the indigenous people of Sri Lanka. They have continued to live in this Island for over 3000 years. Professor Pathmanathan, Historian, Academic, Author and the current Vice Chancellor of the Jaffna University has brought out very cogent evidence in this regard. The Sinhalese Language on the other hand is only 1300 to 1400 years old. Their first grammar, Sidat Sangarawa, was brought out in the 13th Century AD, only 700 years ago.

Until the Portuguese set foot on this Island in 1505 AD, North and East of this Island were ruled by Tamil Kings continuously. In 1833 for administrative purposes the British amalgamated the Tamil areas with the Sinhalese areas. In 1948, at Independence, the British believing the words of the Sinhala leaders who said that they would look after the minorities especially the Tamils as their own siblings handed over power into the hands of the Sinhala Leaders under a Unitary

Constitution. From, that day our traditional Tamil homelands have been in jeopardy. The successive majoritarian Sinhala Governments began in earnest to expropriate the traditional Tamil homelands in the North and East. The process has gained momentum in recent times.

By about 1975 before our youth took up to arms almost 1/3rd of the traditional Tamil Lands in the East had been expropriated by the Sinhala majority governments.

Today the silent expropriation of traditional Tamil Lands has reached a high degree of sophistication and urgency. Very imperceptibly but doggedly the present government with all the resources at its command, is bent on taking over to the Sinhalese the traditional Tamil homelands in Tamil speaking areas.

Various ruses are used to usurp our lands. Our people are fast losing their traditional life style, identity and history. Sinhala life styles, identities and perverted distorted history are being mounted upon our people in these areas with the help of the Military. This is a serious violation of Human Rights. It was to put a stop to such perverse activities by successive governments that the Tamil Youth took up to arms.

Even though in 2009 the armed struggle by our youth was brought to a brutal end the expropriation of our lands in the North and East has not stopped. In fact it has become worse. The Military who were involved in the most brutal, hideous crimes against our people have now started in earnest to expropriate our traditional Tamil Lands. The ruses used include Economic development, Archaeological excavations, Forest preservation, Wild Life sanctuaries and Bird sanctuaries respectively by Mahaweli Authority, Archaeological Department, Forest Department, Wild Life Department and Housing Departments. Many other

Departments are also bent on grabbing lands in the North and East. The recent Oakland Institute Report captioned “Endless War” brings out these matters with evidence.

The latest land grabbing and resources grabbing, centre around the collection of Ilmenite sand, the Primary ore of Titanium along the Eastern coast in Tamil areas and mining of Ilmenite lands too in those areas. The Ilmenite collected, it is understood is exported to China. Tons and Tons of sand from which Ilmenite has been extracted are to be seen in Pulmoddai in the Eastern Province. The coastal areas where sand had been dug and taken away for extraction of Ilmenite are in danger of sea erosion. Internal Mining of Ilmenite disregard rights of local land owners.

The Israeli Professor Oren Yiftachel who has researched into the Land Grabbing taking place in Sri Lanka has called Sri Lanka an Ethnocratic State which means hegemony by a single race over the entire country. He has identified six areas in which such hegemony is clamped upon other races. They are –

1. by demography
2. by Armed Forces
3. by the Spatial System which includes land settlements and planning
4. by Constitutional settings
5. by the flow of Capital and
6. the Culture of the Public sphere

From the time of Independence from the British in 1948 the Ethnocratic State is fast being set up in Sri Lanka. Successive Governments’ desire to set up such an

Ethnocratic State has led to political turmoils, racial contradictions, armed insurrections and severe Human Rights' violations.

Unless this background is understood it would be difficult to bring about reconciliation and peace , accountability and Judicial settlements. International Community must recognize this fact. Without preservation of Human Rights, peace and reconciliation would be farfetched. Similarly to uphold and preserve Human Rights' peace is necessary. Both are interlinked.

Land rights are part of Human Rights. A community's identity, way of life and progress are dependent basically on its traditional living areas and lands. Land is the identity of the group of people who occupy it.

North and East of Sri Lanka are our traditional Homelands for over 3000 years. To expropriate such lands amounts to the destruction of our community. The Indo Sri Lanka Accord of 1987 recognized the North and East of Sri Lanka as the traditional homelands of the Tamils. Thus expropriation of our lands amount to genocide.

This is why we have arranged this International Zoom Conference to identify issues pertaining to the Loss of Tamil Homeland and to discuss ways and means of preserving our traditional Tamil Homelands.

This Conference is our initial attempt. But we would continue to educate the locals and the International Community of what is taking place in Sri Lanka. The International Community is duty bound to help us to retrieve our traditional homelands from the successive rapacious Sinhala Governments.

I welcome all of you once again and wish a successful Conference.

Justice C.V.Wigneswaran

Member of Parliament
Jaffna District
Sri Lanka