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Agenda item 2

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

Written statement* submitted by the Association des étudiants tamouls de France, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[13 February 2017]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Eelam Tamils Right to Self-Determination*

The Eelam Tamils living in the North and East of Sri Lanka are a distinct Nation with their own language, religions, culture and history. The Tamil kingdom existed when the Portuguese took possession of Sri Lanka in 1505. It was the British who merged the North and South kingdoms for administrative convenience in 1833. When the British left in 1948, they had granted independence to Sri Lanka, leaving the political power in the hands of majority Sinhalese.

It is no secret that successive Sinhalese governments have unleashed campaigns against the Eelam Tamil nation, killing over a quarter million Tamils since 1952. Riots and pogroms were organized by the Sinhala state in 1956, 1958, 1977, 1981 and 1983, which saw thousands of Eelam Tamils being killed and their culture and property destroyed. The intent of these vicious campaigns was to slowly marginalize and annihilate the Eelam Tamils as a Nation.

The catastrophic events of May 2009 still haunts the minds of Tamils across the world. In 2009 at the height of the genocide of Eelam Tamils, innocent Tamil civilians were lured into government-declared “no-fire zones” and then intentionally bombed militarily using heavy weapons. According to U.N. sources over 40,000 Tamil civilians died in May 2009 alone; following the height of the Tamil genocide many were forced into internment camps, as reported by international rights groups. However, informed sources put the civilian death toll at the height of the civil war in May 2009 to be over 80,000. Over 7 years removed, Eelam Tamils’ rights continued to be violated. Following mounting international pressure for an independent war crimes investigation into the island the Sri Lankan government made promises to the United Nations to address issues of accountability and provide justice to the Eelam Tamils. The government of Sri Lanka has done nothing serious in that regard. Furthermore, Sri Lanka has a history of establishing commissions to whitewash the International Community in order to fend off international pressure. It is sad that to date not a single Sri Lankan soldier or government official has ever been prosecuted over the killings of Tamil civilians.

Currently the situation for Eelam Tamils in Sri Lanka is very bleak. The military occupation of the Tamil homeland has made it impossible for the Eelam Tamils to advance their political aspirations and even advocate their basic democratic rights. State organized “land grabs” have been accelerated to further colonize the Tamil homeland. Tamils all over the island continue to live in fear of persecution and uncertainty. They are constantly reminded that they are second-class citizens in their own land. Not surprisingly, thousands of Tamils continue to flee the island on boats and ships seeking refuge in other countries. The prospects of Sri Lanka addressing the political aspirations of the Tamils are becoming dim by the day.

It is important to note that years of political, education, cultural and social genocide against the Eelam Tamils by successive Sinhalese governments of Sri Lanka pushed the Tamils to begin a struggle for freedom. Tamils fought for their legitimate aspirations democratically. The Vaddukoddai Resolution of 1976 was a democratic attempt at voicing Tamil aspirations. The Vaddukoddai Resolution was declared by all Tamil political parties in 1976 after having had several meetings with Tamil organizations and it was endorsed by an overwhelming majority of Tamils during the 1977 Sri Lanka General Election. The resolution called for an independent sovereign state of Tamileelam, as being the solution to address the aspirations of the Tamil people. As democratic avenues were violently oppressed by the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil genocide intensified, the Tamil youth formed the Liberation Tigers of Tamileelam (LTTE) to wage an armed resistance in order to secure the mandate that was given by the Tamils in the

Vaddukoddai Resolution. Three important principles that have been central to the Tamil aspirations throughout the last sixty years have been:

1. **Recognition of the Eelam Tamil homeland**
2. **Recognition of Eelam Tamils as a nation**
3. **Recognition of the right to self-determination the Eelam Tamils**

"All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development." - International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Article 1, in accordance with the principles proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations.

The Tamil Youth Organization (TYO) Canada urges the United Nations to conduct a referendum for the Eelam Tamils in Sri Lanka, so that they can ultimately decide their own political destiny. TYO Canada, also calls upon the United Nations to immediately launch an independent international investigation into war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide to seek justice for the Eelam Tamils.

*Tamil Youth Organization – Canada, NGO without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.