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**Joint written statement* submitted by Association des
étudiants tamouls de France, ANAJA (L'Eternel a répondu),
Association Bharathi Centre Culturel Franco-Tamoul,
Association Burkinabé pour la Survie de l'Enfance,
Association pour les Victimes Du Monde, Association
Solidarité Internationale pour l'Afrique (SIA), Society for
Development and Community Empowerment, Tourner la
page, non-governmental organizations 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).



Sri Lanka: The 'colonisation war' against Tamils*

Eelam Tamils has accused the Sri Lankan government of waging a "colonisation war" against the Tamil people of the island of Sri Lanka. The government has been establishing Sinhalese settlements in traditional Tamil areas. We can compare this to Israel's policy of establishing Jewish settlements in the West Bank, Sri Lanka is aiming at creating an Israeli model situation as fast as possible.

Just as Israel uses Jewish settlements to break up the areas inhabited by Palestinians into small fragments, thereby trying to make a Palestinian state impossible, Sri Lanka is using Sinhalese settlements to break up the Tamil areas of northern and eastern Sri Lanka, with the intention of making an independent Tamil state impossible.

For example, a new Sinhalese settlement at Kokkulaay will, in combination with previously established settlements; help cut off the Tamil areas in the east of the island from those in the north. Other settlements and military bases will cut off the Jaffna peninsula from the Tamil areas on the mainland.

The policy of establishing Sinhalese settlements in Tamil areas has a long history. It was an aspect of the overall racist policy pursued by successive Sinhalese-dominated Sri Lankan governments since Sri Lanka (then called Ceylon) gained its independence from Britain in 1948. The two main capitalist parties, the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), competed in promoting Sinhalese racism.

Other racist policies included:

- In 1948 Tamil plantation workers who were born in Sri Lanka but whose ancestors had come from India in the 19th century were denied Sri Lankan citizenship.
- In 1956 Sinhala was made the sole official language. This put Tamils at a disadvantage in getting government jobs and accessing government services.
- In 1971 a process called "standardisation" meant that Tamils had to get higher examination marks than Sinhalese to get into university.
- In 1972 a new constitution made Buddhism (the religion of most Sinhalese) the state religion.

Peaceful protests by the Tamil people against these policies were met with repression by the army and police, as well as pogroms by Sinhalese mobs stirred up by racist politicians and Buddhist monks.

When peaceful protest failed, some Tamil youth took up arms. The main Tamil armed group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), waged a 30-year war for an independent Tamil homeland.

The LTTE was finally defeated in May 2009. At least 200,000 Tamils – probably many more – died in the war. An estimated 70,000 Tamil civilians were killed in the final few weeks of the war, as the Sri Lankan army, air force and navy bombarded the shrinking LTTE-controlled areas.

At the end of the war, 300,000 Tamils were put in concentration camps. While most are now free to leave the camps, many have no homes to return to. Many are prevented from returning to their previous homes by the Sri Lankan army.

The Tamil areas remain under military occupation despite the end of the fighting. During the war large areas of land were declared to be "high security zones" (HSZs). Many Tamils were driven from their homes to create these zones. According to the *Sunday Leader*, a Sri Lankan newspaper: "The HSZs have left 125,000-130,000 civilians displaced and unable to return to their homes in the north and east for the past 20 years".

Despite promises to dismantle the zones following the end of the war, in many cases the original Tamil inhabitants of these areas have not been permitted to return. Often the excuse is that landmines have not been cleared. But in some of these areas Sinhalese settlements have been established. Some of the land has been sold to Sinhalese business interests. There are plans for tourist developments in some of these zones.

Eighty-thousand Sri Lankan military personnel remain as an occupying army in the traditional Tamil areas of the north and east of the island, and are building houses for themselves and their families. The Sri Lankan armed forces are almost entirely Sinhalese in composition.

Repression of the Tamil people continues in many forms. Unknown numbers of alleged LTTE members continue to be detained nearly two years after the end of the war. According to a report issued by the International Commission of Jurists in September 2010, there were still at least 8000 of them at that time.

Murders and disappearances, believed to be carried out by the Sri Lankan army or paramilitary groups allied to it, are frequent occurrences. Tamils are subject to harassment, sexual abuse and extortion at the hands of soldiers.

Tamil culture is under attack. The names of roads and villages are being changed from the Tamil to the Sinhala language. The government has systematically destroyed the cemeteries containing the graves of LTTE soldiers. Hindu temples have been destroyed, vandalised or taken over by the army.

While repression is worst in the Tamil areas, those members of the Sinhalese majority who criticise the government of President Mahinda Rajapaksa are also at risk of repression, including murder and disappearances. For example, Lasantha Wickramatunga, editor of the *Sunday Leader*, was murdered in January 2009. His statement predicting that he would be murdered by the government was published in his newspaper after his death.

Murders and disappearances of opponents of the government continue. For example, cartoonist and political columnist Prageeth Ekneligoda disappeared on January 24, 2010.

Thousands of people are currently being held in detention without charge or trial. According to Amnesty International, "some of those detained are being held secretly where they are vulnerable to a range of abuses, including torture or being killed in custody". Sri Lanka has been under a state of emergency almost continually since 1971. The state of emergency has been continually renewed even after the end of the war.

Despite occasional mild criticism of its human rights record, the Rajapaksa government has been, and the current government is, being supported by the Western countries support played a crucial role in the Sri Lankan government's military victory over the LTTE and the current military occupation of EelamTamil.

Perhaps the most important form of military aid provided by the United States to the Sri Lankan government was in the fields of electronic surveillance and military intelligence. According to Jon Lee Anderson, writing in the *New Yorker*: "Sri Lankan diplomats and military officers acknowledged to me privately that US satellite intelligence had been crucial when, in 2008, Sri Lanka's navy sank seven Tiger ships loaded with military cargo. The ships – members of the Sea Pigeons fleet, which sailed without identification from various Asian seaports – were cruising in international waters, as far as a thousand miles from Sri Lanka, when they were attacked. They carried war material worth tens of millions of dollars, and their destruction deprived the Tigers of their traditional means of military re-supply just as the Sri Lankan Army ramped up hostilities. From then on, the Tigers were on the run, herded ineluctably into shrinking territory".

The US also supplied Sri Lanka with a radar-based maritime surveillance system. Close US allies such as Israel also supplied military equipment.

Donald Perera, the Sri Lankan ambassador to Israel, who is a former Sri Lankan Air Force commander, told the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth*: "For years Israel has aided our war on terror through the exchange of information and the sale of military technology and equipment... Our air force fleet includes 17 Kfir warplanes, and we also have Dabur patrol boats. Our pilots were trained in Israel, and we have received billions of dollars in aid over the past few years."

However, the Sri Lankan government has at times tried to portray any criticism by Western governments, NGOs and aid agencies as a form of "outside interference", in order to win the sympathy of other Third World countries. But the most serious form of outside interference has been imperialist military aid to the Sri Lankan government in its war against the Tamil people.

Because the Tamils living under extreme oppression inside Sri Lanka are at present unable to speak out freely, Tamils in the diaspora, who number more than 1,5 million, have played a leading role raising awareness about the situation and putting forward demands for human rights and national self-determination.

There have been big protests by Tamils in the streets of many cities around the world. Referendums have been held among Tamils in many countries, with more than 98% of the participants voting to reaffirm support for the goal of national self-determination for the Tamil people. Diaspora Tamils have created bodies such as the International Council of Eelam Tamils, and Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam to put forward their views.

Sometimes the protests of the diaspora can have an impact on the policies of Western governments. The decision of the European Union to take away Sri Lanka's preferential access to the European market was in part a response to public awareness of the oppression suffered by Tamils in Sri Lanka.

Recommendations :

1. The judicial process must purely be of international and under the control of the UN, and we request you to recommend the referral to the International Criminal Court or special tribunal for Sri Lanka, and do not support any domestic or hybrid mechanism under the control of Sri Lanka.
2. We request you to take measures to judicially address the Genocide against the Tamil people as called upon by the unanimous resolution adopted by the Northern Provincial Council of Sri Lanka in February 2015.

*Collectif La Paix au Sri Lanka , Swiss Council of Eelam Tamil (SCET), NGOs without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.