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**Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related
forms of intolerance, follow-up and implementation
of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action**

Written statement* submitted by 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.

[22 August 2021]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Historical Racial Discrimination against Eelam Tamils in Sri Lanka

We can describe fundamentalism as: a reliance on religion as a source of identity, boundary setting that determines who belongs and who does not, dramatic eschatology (stories which give meaning), and the dramatization and mythologization of enemies. Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism is different from other fundamentalisms, because there is no insistence on strict behavioural standards and believers do not form a coherent, readily identifiable group. For those Sinhala-Buddhists the Mahavamsa has become the warrant for the interlocked beliefs that the island and its government have traditionally been Sinhala and Buddhist. Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism is determined not only by historical tradition and ideology, but by politics as well. This Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism that has been used as a platform for politicians and patriots since the late nineteenth century, is concerned directly with power and dominance, especially dominance by the ethnic majority, the Sinhalese. This fundamentalism is being supported and promoted by the Sinhala Buddhist majority that very systematically annihilates Tamils in this Island.

Buddhist Chauvinism

With these ground realities we look at Sri Lanka's case of racism & racial discrimination. Main religions in Sri Lanka are Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Roman Catholic. There is a strong overlap between religion and ethnicity in Sri Lanka, with most of the Buddhist majority estimated in the 2012 Census belonging to the Sinhalese population. Similarly, most of the Hindu, Muslim and Christian are Tamil.

Sri Lanka's religious minorities face violations of their constitutional right to religious freedom in many forms, including hate speech, discriminatory practices, threats and intimidation, destruction of property as well as physical violence. Hindus, Muslims and Christians who are just less than 35 per cent of the population, are affected to varying degrees.

Main languages in Sri Lanka are Sinhala (official and national language), Tamil (national language), and English for communication.

In Sri Lanka, Buddhism is given special recognition in the Constitution, which requires Sri Lanka to "protect and foster the Buddha Sasana," where "sasana" implies "rule" or "administration." Despite the constitutional support, insecurities have arisen in the Sinhala community. This communal government creates a culture of impunity where minority groups are attacked without any judicial action taken against the culprits. On the other hand, Buddhist extremist leaders repeatedly disseminate the innocent Tamils are threatening the nation's Buddhist identity. Jehan Perera, the executive director of the National Peace Council NGO says that this kind of xenophobic rhetoric mirrors the "prejudice held by majority of Buddhist population. This onslaught of violence against the Tamils like Hindus, Muslims and Christians politically marginalizes the land, cultures, speech and inalienable and constitutional rights.

Violence and intimidation against Tamil Women

The situation for Tamil women in the north and east of Sri Lanka remains deeply insecure. Thousands of Tamil women lost husbands and other family members to death or disappearance, while human rights abuses and violations ranging from sexual violence to land grabbing have continued.

The Tamil female leaders namely Mrs Thevasagayam Ranjana, Mrs. Selvarani Tambirasa from Amparai, Mrs. Mariyasuresh Easwari from Mullaithivu, Mrs Sebasitan Devi from Thrincomalai, Mrs. Amalanathan Amalanayagi from Batticola and hundreds of others of the Association of the Relatives of the Enforced Disappeared people are being tortured and monitored by the Sri Lankan military, the policemen and the court for working for justice and conducting a public rally on the world international day of the enforce-fully Disappeared People (30. 08. 2020) in the Eastern Province. The militarization of the north and east from

2009 has contributed to continued insecurity for minority women. Many, especially widows and the wives of disappeared or ‘surrendered’, are vulnerable to sexual harassment, exploitation or assault by army personnel or other militias.

National Education

With respects to the national education policy, the Sanga alleged that those attempts have been made to remove literature and history of minority from the school curricula in the past and that education must be made foremost priority.

Sri Lanka’s education system has increasingly come under scrutiny for a racial bias which teaches historical inaccuracies and promotes a Sinhala Buddhist narrative. In July 2019, Hill Country Development Minister Lakshman Kiriella, admitted to this educational bias as he alleged that Tamils and Muslims were portrayed as “foreign invaders” to the island.

Sri Lanka’s education policy has come under particular focus in the post-war years as scholars such as Professor Rachel Seoighe and Professor Kate Cronin Furman argue that the state has played an active role in crafting a hostile narrative that celebrates the defeat of terrorism whilst also silencing and “denying the suffering inflicted by the victors” and ‘policing the memory of their victims’.

The syllabus of national education system erases existence of minorities, archaeological evidences of minorities and history, their efforts and contributions of minorities, particularly Eezham Thamizhs for nation building. National education becomes communal, discriminatory, majoritarian, one-sided and biased. The Sinhala history in the national education eclipses the minorities. The minorities will definitely be eliminated from the history of Srilanka. The freedom struggle will be portrayed as terrorist act in the educational books.

Erosion of Existence of Minority

Sinhala only ‘lion flags’ were pictured flying alongside Buddhist flags in Kandy today, as the town prepares for the swearing-in of Sri Lanka’s newly appointed ministers at the ‘Temple of the Tooth’, in what looks set to be another Sinhala Buddhist ceremony on 12. 08. 2020.

The flags, Sri Lankan lion flags which have had the token representation stripes for Tamils and Muslims removed, have long been associated with racist Sinhalese movements. This is unconstitutional act against the constitution of Srilanka. This is a punishable crime. The family rule will always go against the constitution.

Their hoisting, alongside Buddhist flags, was captured by Yazh News, as the town prepares for the ceremony at the Temple of Sacred Tooth Relic. Sri Lankan president Gotabaya Rajapaksa visited the temple last week, where he spoke of the tooth relic as ‘a symbol of status denoting the right to ascend the throne’ and claimed, “99 percent of Sri Lanka’s relics are of Buddhist heritage”.

In recent years the flags have been flown several times by extremist Sinhala groups, including those behind the ‘Sinha Le’ or ‘Lion’s Blood’ movement and other organisations accused of hate speech.

The ministry of harmony among official languages of the government, the ministry for Hindu and Muslim affairs were dissolved and instead the ministry for Buddhist issues was instituted by the newly elected government. The person who was against the rule by the province was appointed as a minister of this ministry. When the 63 children were killed by the military the person who gave a speech to BBC News section that terrorists were dead was appointed as the minister of the Media and communication. The ministry for minority is on decline, but the ministry for the majority is on the increase.

Sri Lanka’s national flag is dominated by a lion, the Sinhala national symbol, holding a sword facing two small strips, which were added to represent the Tamil and Muslim communities. In 1972, the government added four leaves of the Bo tree, a holy Buddhist tree, to the flag.

Tamils have long rejected Sri Lanka's flag and other national symbols, with many raising black flags as a sign of protest instead on Sri Lankan Independence Day.

Religious Harmony under Threat

After becoming the president of Sri Lanka Mr. Gotapoya Rajapaksha did away with the ministry of Hindu and Muslim affairs retaining the ministry of Buddha Sasan under which all religious matters are to be discussed. The ministry of Buddha Sasan, the ministry of culture and the archaeological department are entrusted to Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksha.

A high commission, namely Buddhist Advisory Sabha was newly created by the President for guiding the government. In this Sabha, the members of Maha Sangha who are Sinhala Buddhist extremists are the active members who exclude all the minorities.

An exceptional importance is given to this Sabha that will gather together on third Friday of every month under the leadership of the President at the presidential office. The resolution of incorporation of Tamils into archaeological department by the Srisena- Ranil government was blindly rejected by the present government of Sri Lanka.

According to Fr. Rajan Rohan, the secretary of Inter-Religious Forum in Batticola, to implement the Presidential Task Force for Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province is a well-planned move that threatens minorities and puts their inclusive democratic rights into question.

The all-Sinhala Task Force perpetuates the building of the huge gap between Sinhala Buddhist majorities and the Tamil minorities that feel directly affected. The Singhalese are being communalized against the Tamil minorities.

Recommendations

We ask to the Human Rights Council Members States:

- to organize a Special session on Sri Lanka as earlier possible.
- to Refer Sri Lanka to the International Criminal Court.
- Appoint a country-specific Rapporteur for Sri Lanka to monitor and report to the International Community.

Gouvernement en Exil du Tamil Eelam, COLLECTIF DE FEMMES POUR LES DROITS DE L'HOMME, GLOBAL TAMIL MOUVEMENT, Association Internationale Contre les Disparitions forcées, Association des Droits de l'Homme de Nevers, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.