



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
CANADA**

CANADA AND THE CRISIS IN SRI LANKA

Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

**Kevin Sorenson, MP
Chair**

MAY 2009

40th PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION



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THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

has the honour to present its

FIFTH REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the Committee has studied the key elements of Canadian Foreign Policy in regards to the crises in Sri Lanka and has agreed to report the following:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

By early 2009, the long-running conflict in Sri Lanka had shifted decisively in favour of the government. As the Government of Sri Lanka attempted to achieve a complete military victory over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, (LTTE or Tamil Tigers) over the next several months, more than 100,000 civilians were trapped in an ever-shrinking territory in the northeast of the country. Thousands of civilians were killed as a result of actions and inactions by both the LTTE and the government, and while the majority of civilians eventually managed to escape the conflict zone, they remained at risk in inadequate camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) administered by government security forces. By 11 May 2009, the UN estimated that at least 50,000 civilians remained in the conflict zone, while almost 200,000 were in IDP camps in desperate need of a range of humanitarian assistance.¹

Following hearings with a wide range of witnesses, members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development have concluded that further urgent action is necessary by the Government of Canada, both with like-minded partners and on its own if necessary, to address three interrelated issues: 1) the immediate humanitarian catastrophe in the north of Sri Lanka, which threatens thousands of civilians; 2) the medium-term challenges of reconstruction, resettlement and governance after the current fighting ends; and 3) the longer-term challenges of peace-building and political reconciliation in Sri Lanka following decades of civil war.

List of Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Government of Canada should continue to call upon all parties in Sri Lanka to immediately cease fire and end hostilities.

Recommendation 2

The Government of Canada should redouble its efforts in cooperation with other states to meet the humanitarian needs of all civilians in northeastern Sri Lanka, including those still in the combat zone and those in IDP camps, by securing a sufficient humanitarian pause and through international supervision of assistance.

Recommendation 3

The Government of Canada should stand ready to increase Canadian assistance to Sri Lanka in collaboration with other partners, as on-the-ground assessments and capacity to absorb warrant, not only for relief purposes but also for development and reconstruction. In addition to ensuring that assistance reaches those who need it most, the government should pursue a whole-of-government strategy to ensure that Canadian assistance of all sorts encourages longer-term reconciliation among communities in Sri Lanka.

Recommendation 4

¹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Sri Lanka: Vanni Emergency," Situation Report No.9, 11 May 2009

The Government of Canada should call on the United Nations Security Council to seriously engage itself in the resolution of the conflict in Sri Lanka, and to investigate the conduct of both parties during the conflict with respect to international law. The Government of Canada should also initiate a dialogue with the Government of Sri Lanka, in conjunction with the international community, aimed at laying the groundwork for a political reconciliation between the communities. If these efforts fail, the Government of Canada should consider financial and diplomatic sanctions, including, but not limited to, advocating for Sri Lanka's suspension from the Commonwealth, as well as incentives.

CANADA AND THE CRISIS IN SRI LANKA

Introduction

Conflicts evolve, and by the spring of 2009 the long-running conflict on the island of Sri Lanka had reached a critical phase as a result of a shift in the military balance in favour of government forces. The respected International Crisis Group explains the background to the current crisis – and the shared responsibility of both the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tamil Tigers) in the conflict - in this way:

Sri Lanka has been wracked by violent conflict for most of the past 25 years, suffering more than 100,000 deaths in conflicts in both the north and south. Successive attempts to resolve the ethnic conflict between Sri Lankan Tamils, who have traditionally inhabited the northern and eastern regions, and Sinhalese, concentrated in the central and southern regions, have been tried since the 1950s, but with no success.

The nature of the main Tamil nationalist organization, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), has made any peace settlement particularly hard. The LTTE has been banned in many countries because of its use of suicide bombers and child soldiers, widespread human rights abuses, and its intolerance of any dissent among Tamils.

Sinhalese-dominated political parties have consistently failed to reach consensus on reasonable power-sharing or devolution proposals that might be acceptable to the majority of Tamils. Party politics has interfered with any common approach to the conflict, and extreme nationalist parties have frequently derailed any attempt to offer concessions. Without a two-thirds majority in parliament – which no single party can achieve under current electoral rules – no constitutional reforms are possible. The LTTE has shown no interest in even the most generous devolution proposals offered by recent governments.¹

Considering the urgency of the situation and in order to better understand current developments in the conflict, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development held a series of hearings on the humanitarian and related crises in Sri Lanka in March and April 2009. The Committee met with academics,

¹ International Crisis Group, “Sri Lanka” project page, accessible at: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4459>

respected NGOs with on-the-ground experience, members of the Tamil, Sinhalese and Tamil-speaking religious communities in Canada, as well as government officials.

The Committee recognizes the complexities of the current situation in that country, which “has been shaped by historical, territorial, and socio-economic forces, including colonialism and party politics and caste issues and religion,” as Professor Bruce Matthews of Acadia University told the Committee.² It is also mindful of the emotional and familial connections to the conflict that are a reality for many Canadians and others around the world. Government officials provided the Committee with an overview of Canadian diplomatic and development responses to the current crises in Sri Lanka, and added that Canada “has reiterated that this conflict cannot be resolved militarily and continues to call for a new, meaningful and durable political solution that will address the legitimate aspirations of all the people of Sri Lanka.”³ Canada’s Minister of International Cooperation travelled to the country at the beginning of May to communicate the government’s concerns to the Government of Sri Lanka and pledge further assistance.

In light of the evidence it heard, the Committee is convinced of the need for further urgent action by the Government of Canada both with like-minded partners and on its own if necessary to address three interrelated issues: 1) the immediate humanitarian catastrophe in the north of Sri Lanka, which threatens thousands of civilians; 2) the medium-term challenges of reconstruction, resettlement and governance after the current fighting ends; and 3) the longer-term challenges of peacebuilding and political reconciliation following decades of civil war. While the LTTE deserves much blame for the current situation, Assistant Deputy Minister Ken Sunquist of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) told the Committee at the end of April that “Canada holds the Government of Sri Lanka to a higher standard for its actions and obligations than it would the terrorist organization it is fighting.”⁴ The overriding question is, therefore, how best to engage with the Government of Sri Lanka, which throughout the crisis has largely defied international calls for restraint, yet without whose cooperation prosperity and lasting peace in that country will be impossible.

Addressing Urgent Humanitarian Needs

The most immediate and pressing challenge in Sri Lanka is the humanitarian crisis in the north. Following a relentless military campaign that began in late 2007, the Sri Lankan military was reported to be on the verge of totally defeating LTTE by the spring of 2009 – although the fact that the Government of Sri Lanka prevented media and full humanitarian access to the area made confirmation of details difficult. Witnesses and international observers highlighted the serious impact the current conflict is having on the civilian population. On March 25, Jonathan Papoulidis of World Vision Canada told the Committee that some 150,000 civilians remained trapped in the conflict zone:

² *Evidence*, Meeting No. 12, March 30, 2009.

³ *Evidence*, Meeting No. 15, 29 April, 2009.

⁴ *Evidence*, Meeting No.15, 29 April 2009.

Their plight is sure to worsen as the conflict narrows to a smaller stretch of land and measures of resistance become more desperate. Our deepest concern is for the affected children. Hundreds have already been killed and thousands more are cornered and confronted with little possibility of escape.⁵

On March 23, Susan Johnston of the Canadian Red Cross told the Committee that “absolutely the situation is continuing to deteriorate.”⁶ She explained that while the Red Cross had both pre-positioned supplies with its partners and had the best access of any humanitarian group to those under threat, it did not have full access to the war zone. She called on Canada to increase its contribution to the work of the Red Cross and partner humanitarian organizations active in Sri Lanka, and added:

We're also looking for the Government of Canada to make it clear to the Sri Lankan government that there is an expectation that the basic tenets of international humanitarian law will be respected, which is to say, civilians should have access to humanitarian assistance. Those in a position to deliver humanitarian assistance should have safe access to those civilians. That is not, in fact, the situation we face today.⁷

While the LTTE's call on the international community to broker a ceasefire in February 2009 was rejected by the Government of Sri Lanka as a ploy by the LTTE to buy time to regroup and rearm, most witnesses supported a humanitarian pause to allow humanitarian assistance to reach civilians caught in the fighting. On April 6 the Government of Sri Lanka argued that it had rejected calls for a “humanitarian ceasefire” because they were “unrealistic in the current context of defeating the terrorism of the LTTE and the need to save the civilians being held hostage by it,” and added that “most of these appeals were seen as ill-considered moves, based on pro-LTTE propaganda.”⁸ On April 8, Sir John Holmes, the UN's under-secretary general for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief co-ordinator, wrote in a British newspaper that:

As London witnesses Tamil protests, a bloodbath on the beaches of northern Sri Lanka seems an increasingly real possibility. The Sri Lankan military has pushed the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam into an area so small that any shooting or shelling inevitably causes casualties among the 150,000 to 190,000 civilians trapped in the same zone. There have been many hundreds of civilian deaths caused by firing from both sides, though exact numbers and who fired what and when are impossible to verify. It is clear that the LTTE is refusing to let people flee, though many are managing to

⁵ *Evidence*, Meeting No. 11, March 25, 2009.

⁶ *Evidence*, Meeting No. 10, March 23, 2009.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Government of Sri Lanka, “Troops Succeed in Massive Humanitarian Intervention – LTTE's Last Position Caves In,” ReliefWeb, April 6 2009.

escape somehow, and I fear the combatants may be gearing up for a final confrontation. This is a very grave situation.⁹

International pressure for a pause in the fighting to allow humanitarian access to the trapped civilians continued through the United Nations and other fora. On April 11 Canada, whose High Commissioner in Sri Lanka has chaired meetings of like-minded ambassadors and the United Nations to coordinate humanitarian efforts, again called on both parties to implement a humanitarian pause.¹⁰ On April 12 the Government of Sri Lanka unilaterally announced that it would not attack the LTTE over the Sinhalese and Tamil new year period in order to allow civilians to escape the so-called no-fire zone.¹¹ While UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon initially welcomed this short pause as a “useful first step,” On April 15 the UN’s John Holmes told the press that the ceasefire had been “inadequate,” adding that “it’s clear that 48 hours was not long enough to allow us to get in significant amounts of aid, or indeed to allow visits by humanitarian workers to the area...unfortunately, it is also clear that not only did this not allow more civilians to get out, there seemed to be less civilians getting out during the pause than before.” Holmes criticized the LTTE for not letting civilians go, and the Government of Sri Lanka for not living up to repeated promises not to use heavy weapons in the area.¹²

On April 25, G8 foreign ministers issued a statement to express their deep concern about the mass civilian casualties and deteriorating situation in northern Sri Lanka. On April 29, Canadian government officials told the Committee that the UN estimated that some 50,000 to 100,000 civilians remained trapped in the conflict zone, while many who had escaped the zone were housed in Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps. There are mounting problems with these camps, including overcrowding and a shortage of medical personnel to assist some 160,000 IDPs now in the north. Officials added that some 10,000 children now suffer from malnutrition and over 1,500 infants need urgent medical attention. More pointedly, Ken Sunquist of DFAIT told members that, “The Government of Sri Lanka cannot cope with 160,000 people in IDP camps. It will be a mass disaster unless the international community contributes to that.”¹³

The fact that the Government of Sri Lanka prevented access to the conflict zone and rejected calls for a humanitarian pause for months while it tried to achieve a decisive military victory over the LTTE-- and by the end of April was still not issuing visa requests for the replacement of international humanitarian staff -- undoubtedly increased the loss of civilian life in this conflict and made the humanitarian crisis much more dire. The LTTE also deserves much criticism for not letting civilians leave the conflict zone.

⁹ Sir John Holmes, “Let Them Decide: Civilians Trapped with Tamil Tigers Fighters Must Be Offered an Exit Before Bloodbath Ensues,” *The Guardian*, 8 April 2009.

¹⁰ See *Evidence*, Meeting No. 15, 29 April 2009 and “Canada Expresses Concern about Civilians trapped in Conflict in Sri Lanka,” Foreign Affairs and International Trade News Release No. 96, 11 April 2009.

¹¹ Ranga Sirilal, “New Years Halt to Sri Lanka Fighting – President,” Reuters Foundation, 12 April 2009, accessed on ReliefWeb.

¹² “Hailing Sri Lanka Government’s two-day pause in military action against rebels, Secretary-General says UN will do all it can to help civilians in conflict zone,” SG/SM/12183, 12 April 2009, accessed on ReliefWeb. Sri Lanka: Two-day ceasefire ‘Inadequate’ Says UN, IRIN, 16 April 2009, accessed on ReliefWeb.

¹³ *Evidence*, Meeting No. 15, 29 April 2009.

In early May, Canada's Minister of International Cooperation, Bev Oda, travelled to Sri Lanka to convey Canadian concerns. After meeting with the President and Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka, the minister announced additional Canadian humanitarian assistance of \$3 million, which will be provided to the International Committee of the Red Cross, Médecins Sans Frontières, the World Food Program and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. This new pledge, in addition to \$4.5 million Canada had already pledged in February, brings Canada's assistance to civilians in Sri Lanka to \$ 7.5 million this year. Minister Oda added that:

This tragic situation for the civilians is of grave concern and our government is responding to the increasing need for assistance... This additional funding will provide essential food, water, shelter and medical care to the displaced populations. We are strongly urging all parties to immediately cease fire and facilitate access for humanitarian workers to give the urgently needed assistance.¹⁴

The Committee strongly believes that the overwhelming international priority right now in Sri Lanka *must* be the humanitarian one.

Recommendation 1

The Government of Canada should continue to call upon all parties in Sri Lanka to immediately cease fire and end hostilities.

Recommendation 2

The Government of Canada should redouble its efforts in cooperation with other states to meet the humanitarian needs of all civilians in northeastern Sri Lanka, including those still in the combat zone and those in IDP camps, by securing a sufficient humanitarian pause and through international supervision of assistance.

Assisting Reconstruction and Reconciliation

While the immediate international priority in Sri Lanka must be the humanitarian one, medium and longer-term challenges cannot be forgotten. As Ken Sunquist of DFAIT put it, "The short term is only to make sure that people survive. The long term is what kind of life they're going to live."¹⁵

¹⁴ Canadian International Development Agency, "Canada Increases Humanitarian Aid to Sri Lanka," News Release, May 4, 2009

¹⁵ *Evidence*, Meeting No. 15, 29 April 2009.

While most witnesses suggested that the end of the current fighting in the north will not bring an end to the political violence in Sri Lanka, it would mark an important stage in the long running conflict. Jonathan Papoulidis of World Vision Canada told Members:

As we engage in planning for recovery and rehabilitation, we cannot overstate the importance of adjusting to new dynamic and complex realities on the ground. That the Sri Lankan government is now in control of more territory than it has been since the early 1980s carries implications, as well as opportunities, that must be properly understood, managed, and supported for peace and peace building.¹⁶

Following the end of the fighting and the necessary attention that will have to be paid to immediate humanitarian needs, the Government of Sri Lanka will then be faced with the medium-term challenge of rebuilding communities in the affected area, returning those displaced by the fighting to their places of origin as soon as possible, and administering communities that were until recently under the control of the LTTE.

Similar challenges faced Sri Lanka following the tsunami in 2004, and have existed in the east of the country since the expulsion of the LTTE in 2007. In March 2009 the International Institute for Strategic Studies argued that while some progress has been made in that area, “there is concern over insidious ‘Sinhalisation’ as the displaced are resettled, and this may yet stall internationally led relief and reconstruction operations.”¹⁷ The UN’s John Holmes was more blunt on a recent visit to Sri Lanka, using meetings with the government to underscore “the need to put to rest suspicions of wanting to manipulate the ethnic mix in the north or keeping (Internally Displaced Persons) in long-term camps against their will.”¹⁸ Officials told the Committee that there had been “murmurs” several months ago that the Government of Sri Lanka planned to turn the IDP camps into more permanent “welfare” ones, and that a lot of international pressure had been put on the Government of Sri Lanka to abandon that plan.¹⁹

Witnesses before the Committee agreed that beyond immediate humanitarian assistance for civilians trapped in the conflict zone and those in IDP camps, Canada should contribute to longer-term reconstruction in Sri Lanka. CIDA officials explained to the Committee that Canada has a long history of development cooperation with Sri Lanka, with a total to date of over \$800 million in Canadian assistance. They said that over the past 15 years, CIDA’s bilateral assistance has helped to address the root causes of the conflict, and mitigate its impact on affected communities. Annual funding levels have been \$5 million to \$6 million, while the recent focus of the program has been to support economic well being. They

¹⁶ *Evidence*, Meeting No. 11, March 25, 2009.

¹⁷ International Institute for Strategic Studies, “The Tamil Tigers’ Last Stand?” *Strategic Comments*, Vol. 15, Issue 2, March 2009.

¹⁸ Briefing to the Security Council on the Humanitarian Situation in Sri Lanka, statement by Mr. John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief coordinator, 27 February 2009, p.3.

¹⁹ *Evidence*, Meeting No. 15, 29 April, 2009.

added that “CIDA's explicit approach is to work through Canadian NGOs and civil society organizations and to maintain a geographic and ethnic balance by supporting projects in the Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim areas of the country.”²⁰

In testimony before the Committee, Jonathan Papoulidis of World Vision Canada stated that “Canada should support a durable peace process that addresses the root causes of the conflict, that works to empower communities and local governance, and that helps restore basic services and critical infrastructure.”²¹ Several witnesses called for Canada to increase assistance, and others suggested that CIDA should streamline its procedures to allow smaller-scale initiatives to proceed quickly, or that it should match funds collected by Canadian Tamils and others for assistance.²² CIDA officials told the Committee that its processes had already been “considerably simplified,” to enable the quick provision of assistance quickly through trusted Canadian and other humanitarian partners on the ground. When asked about the possibility of increased assistance, CIDA officials said that any decisions would require on-the-ground assessments of issues such as the capacity of the country to absorb further funding.²³

Professor Kenneth Bush of St. Paul University agreed that Canada should contribute to both reconstruction and broader development in Sri Lanka, adding that data several years ago showed that years of high defence spending had skewed the economy of the island by making communities in the south dependent on remittances from soldiers deployed to the north. While it is important to ensure that assistance reaches those who need it most, more important for the long-term is ensuring that “all development assistance that goes to Sri Lanka should be assessed for whether or not it contributes to bringing communities together or pushing them apart.”²⁴ Professor Alexandre Sévigny of McMaster University argued that the transfer of Canadian expertise in areas such as communications could be useful in “creating bridges between diverse communities” in countries such as Sri Lanka that have suffered internal ethnic conflict.²⁵ Professor Elliot Tepper of Carleton University called for “equitable redevelopment”:

Equitable redevelopment means that both the key parties to this dispute have to have a stake in it and have to be rewarded by it. It has to be seen to provide dignity and fairness on all sides. It also has to have—if I can put it this way—a clear Canadian content so that our approach is recognized as one of accommodation, inclusion, and power-sharing. I think there's great scope here for evolving out of this particular crisis an approach to doing Canadian

²⁰ *Evidence*, Meeting No.15, 29 April 2009.

²¹ *Evidence*, Meeting No. 11, March 25, 2009.

²² *Evidence*, Meeting No. 13, April 1, 2009.

²³ *Evidence*, Meeting No. 15, April 29, 2009.

²⁴ *Evidence*, Meeting No. 10, March 23, 2009.

²⁵ *Evidence*, Meeting No. 13, April 1, 2009.

foreign policy that would be distinctive and dynamic and effective.
But it will take some work to put that package together.²⁶

Recommendation 3

The Government of Canada should stand ready to increase Canadian assistance to Sri Lanka in collaboration with other partners, as on-the-ground assessments and capacity to absorb warrant, not only for relief purposes but also for development and reconstruction. In addition to ensuring that assistance reaches those who need it most, the government should pursue a whole-of-government strategy to ensure that Canadian assistance of all sorts encourages longer-term reconciliation among communities in Sri Lanka.

Engaging with the Government of Sri Lanka

In order to achieve both the short-term goal of addressing the immediate humanitarian crisis – through a pause in the fighting and adequate assistance to civilians – and the longer-term goals of reconstruction, development and reconciliation, the overarching challenge highlighted by the Committee’s hearings is the need for Canada and the rest of the international community to engage with the Government of Sri Lanka to secure its cooperation. Elliot Tepper explained that part of the complexity of the situation in Sri Lanka is the presence of a “double minority complex,” whereby the Tamils rightly see themselves as a small minority on the island, while the majority Sinhalese population perceives itself as a minority in the broader South Asian region. Therefore, as he pointed out, “... both of these communities can be described as having something of a minority complex. They see the need to defend themselves as communities; they behave accordingly, and I think a lot of that perception of threat can explain the underlying causes of the current situation.”²⁷ The combination of this underlying perspective and the prospect of what the government sees as “victory” after 25 years of civil war have made it more certain of its direction and less open to what it sees as outside “interference.”

For example, Bruce Matthews, who was the Canadian representative on the International Independent Group of Eminent Persons, invited by the Sri Lankan government to observe and monitor the deliberation of a Presidential commission on human rights abuses, told the Committee that the group resigned after some 14 months of frustrating work in 2007-2008, “having concluded that its advice was not welcome and indeed was ignored by the state.”²⁸

While Canada has a long history of relations with Sri Lanka, including through Canadian organizations such as the Forum of Federations which offered support and advice on governance concepts such as federalism, witnesses were clear that the current Sri Lankan leadership is unlikely to invite international actors to participate in such work again in the near future. Professor David Cameron of the University of Toronto, who visited Sri Lanka a number of times including with the Forum of Federations, emphasized that Canada and

²⁶ *Evidence*, Meeting No. 10, March 23, 2009.

²⁷ *Evidence*, Meeting No. 10, March 23, 2009

²⁸ *Evidence*, Meeting No. 12, March 30, 2009.

Canadians must “be realistic about their potential influence.” Speaking of the present Sri Lankan government, he said:

The Sri Lankan government is suspicious of foreign intervention and generally believes, I think, that much of what the international community has tried to do has, in fact, been unhelpful to the government and its central goals. Therefore the space for creative involvement post-conflict may be more limited than one would like.²⁹

While the Committee recognizes this need for caution, it also agrees with the witnesses who argued that Canada and like-minded states must nevertheless *try* to engage the Sri Lankan government. The Committee agrees with the Canadian government that a “new, meaningful and durable political solution that will address the legitimate aspirations of all the people of Sri Lanka” is needed. Ken Sunquist of DFAIT added that “The future of this beautiful country cannot be foreseen when the present situation is such a shambles, yet long-term efforts towards devolution of power to local areas will be necessary.”³⁰

A hopeful point came from Robert Dietz of the Committee to Protect Journalists. Mr. Dietz strongly criticized the failure of the Government of Sri Lanka to investigate adequately a number of high-profile and well-organized murders of journalists. He noted:

Frankly, we’ve seen these attacks on the media coincide fairly closely with the increase in the government’s military activities in the north and taking on the LTTE. Once the government decided it was going to push for an all-out military victory and try to end this war once and for all, it was very clearly decided that they would no longer brook any kind of criticism on the home front from opposition papers or anyone else.³¹

Despite this, however, he still saw the potential for dialogue:

This is not a government filled with raving maniacs. This is not a government filled with hard-line ideologically driven people. I think a great number of people feel supportive of this war effort on which, internationally there are certainly mixed feelings. But I think within the government of Sri Lanka there are still people, individuals and ministries, which will hear these messages and which will deliver these up the line to the President and the rest of his family.

There are options of sanctions, there are options of isolation, there are options of financial pressure and I think those should be

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ *Evidence*, Meeting No. 15, 29 April 2009.

³¹ *Evidence*, Meeting No. 11, March 25, 2009.

considered but I still see this as a group of people who have taken a very hard line but can still be spoken with.³²

Canadian officials agreed, arguing that “There is a misapprehension. There are a number of moderate Tamils in the Government of Sri Lanka right now, so it’s not as though it’s a clean divide of people based on religious or ethnic groups. There are ministers and there are different people. We can find people to work with who want the best for the people of the country.”³³

A critical point to emphasize with the Government of Sri Lanka and others is that support for the rights of the Tamil peoples who make up the majority of those currently in danger, as well as for longer-term political reconciliation in that country and the right of groups to defend their interests peacefully and democratically does not imply support for the LTTE. The LTTE is a terrorist organization that is banned in Canada and many other countries, and which has been fighting for over twenty five years to achieve a separate Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka through tactics that have included suicide bombings and the use of child soldiers.

As the International Crisis Group argued in early March,

The Sri Lankan government has a right under international law to respond to terrorist attacks and protect its territorial integrity. But destroying the Tigers at the cost of thousands of civilian lives is a prescription for deeper alienation of Tamils in Sri Lanka, radicalisation of Tamils around the world, and years of continued bloodshed.³⁴

It added that “The international community has a responsibility to do all it can to preserve whatever chances there are for political dialogue leading to a lasting resolution of Sri Lanka’s conflict and for eventual reconciliation between communities.”³⁵

While condemning violence by all parties, Yoga Arulnamby of the Association of Sri Lankan Graduates of Canada told the Committee that,

Whether the international community agrees or not, it is generally accepted among the majority of Tamils that the only group that was steadfast in defending Tamil rights, notwithstanding the violence, is the LTTE...Many Tamils consider the actions by LTTE ...justified because they feel that had the LTTE not existed, the Tamil population would have been wiped out or would have suffered more at the hands of the Sri Lankan armed forces.

³² Ibid.

³³ *Evidence*, Meeting No. 15, 29 April 2009.

³⁴ International Crisis Group, “Sri Lanka Conflict Alert,” 9 March 2009.

³⁵ Ibid.

More importantly, however, he added that “Both the LTTE and the various governments (of Sri Lanka) have to accept joint blame for this status quo. Violence has been committed by both parties, as documented by various organizations, and innocent Tamil people have been at the receiving end of all these brutalities.”³⁶

Although some Tamils may still view the LTTE as “freedom fighters,” it is impossible to truly gauge support for the group given its violence and other tactics towards moderate Tamils who may be more willing to pursue political accommodation. In terms of the Sinhalese majority, Elliot Tepper argued in his testimony that:

the current mood ...on the Sinhalese side may be in the triumphalist mode, but my feeling is this: everybody is sick and tired on all sides of this war. There’s a demand and a desire for peace. If proposals can be put forward that have...equitable components, all the leaders will be forced to come to some terms...³⁷

Jonathan Papoulidis of World Vision Canada made a number of recommendations on how to engage with the Government of Sri Lanka. He strongly urged the Canadian government to “engage at this critical moment to support the Sri Lankan government in proposing next steps for lasting peace and development.” In terms of coordinating international efforts, he recommended that Canada lead efforts to appoint a UN Special Envoy for the crisis, arguing that “The Sri Lankan government has identified the UN as the primary point of contact among international partners for the response. This opens up opportunities for direct advice giving and coordination.”³⁸

He also recommended that:

... the immediate first step would be for a delegation, made up of parliamentarians from all parties and senior government officials as well as aid agencies and experts, to visit the country, ideally within the next three months. The delegation should take stock of the humanitarian situation and develop recommendations back to the government, including through this committee, on how to target support for peace, recovery, and longer-term development for the affected region.³⁹

With regard to the broader question of how the international community can best make its voice heard by the Government of Sri Lanka, witnesses argued for the use of concerted economic and political pressure, with some suggesting that Canada advocate for the suspension of Sri Lanka from the Commonwealth. Others have pointed out that Sri Lanka has requested and will continue to need both immediate humanitarian and longer-term

³⁶ *Evidence*, Meeting No. 10, March 23, 2009.

³⁷ *Evidence*, Meeting No. 10, March 23, 2009.

³⁸ *Evidence*, Meeting No. 11, March 25, 2009.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

assistance, including assistance through the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to deal with the impact of the global financial crisis. When asked about the possibility of withholding such assistance, however, Ken Sunquist of DFAIT responded that such actions would likely mean the loss of any future ability to influence behaviour, and would be at a cost to the people of Sri Lanka. He argued that while Canadians and others might be tempted to employ sanctions when dealing with the Government of Sri Lanka in the current context, using short-term incentives instead might be more effective in building long-term cooperation.⁴⁰ Critically, the international community needs to make every effort to convince the Government of Sri Lanka that restraint and openness to a political solution is in its own best interest in the long-term.

Recommendation 4

The Government of Canada should call on the United Nations Security Council to seriously engage itself in the resolution of the conflict in Sri Lanka, and to investigate the conduct of both parties during the conflict with respect to international law. The Government of Canada should also initiate a dialogue with the Government of Sri Lanka, in conjunction with the international community, aimed at laying the groundwork for a political reconciliation between the communities. If these efforts fail, the Government of Canada should consider financial and diplomatic sanctions, including, but not limited to, advocating for Sri Lanka's suspension from the Commonwealth, as well as incentives.

Canada's Sri Lankan Diaspora

Some 250,000 people of Sri Lankan origin – mainly Tamils -- call Canada their home today, many having fled their country of birth because of this very conflict between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE. The Committee heard from representatives both of Canada's Tamil community and its Sinhalese community. In their testimony, they and other witnesses expressed their serious concerns about the current crisis and their views on the conflict's history and evolution.

The Committee agrees with the views of many of the witnesses it heard, who argued that *both* the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE bear significant responsibility for the current situation in Sri Lanka. The Committee also recognizes that the conflict in Sri Lanka has reached a critical point where the Sri Lankan government seems on the verge of eliminating the LTTE as a military force – although a number of witnesses argued that guerrilla warfare will likely continue for decades.

It was clear from the testimony of members of the Canadian Tamil community that some Tamils in Canada are concerned that the Sri Lankan government will not stop at killing LTTE militants, but will use the current crisis to effectively obliterate the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka. While this is strongly denied by the Sri Lankan government, the fact that Tamils

⁴⁰ *Evidence*, Meeting No. 15, 29 April 2009.

around the world strongly share this fear underlines the depth of mistrust that must eventually be overcome if sustained peace is to be achieved.

The ongoing conflict in Sri Lanka has illustrated a reality of the globalized international system of which Canada is a part. To some Canadians, Sri Lanka may seem like a far-away place with little direct or tangible relevance to Canada's national interests. To others, the course of the conflict in that country is a vital concern, which was demonstrated at every meeting of this Committee. Canadian society in the twenty-first century is a multicultural mosaic whose strength is based on incorporating people from all over the world. This reality brings with it significant implications for Canadian decision-makers, parliamentarians, and citizens. What were once seen as domestic or "Canadian" concerns and interests can no longer be distinguished so easily from wider international events. In other words, what is happening in Sri Lanka does matter, not only to Canadian foreign policy, but also to thousands of Canadians.

As one example of a domestic implication of the conflict in Sri Lanka, there are serious concerns about the efforts of the LTTE in Canada and other countries to raise funds and gain influence. The Committee was deeply disturbed by testimony and media reports claiming that some supporters of the LTTE practice intimidation and extortion among the large Tamil community within Canada. While the financing of terrorist groups is illegal in Canada, ending practices such as intimidation and extortion is obviously a challenge. In April 2009, RCMP documents were released that alleged that a Canadian non-profit organization -- the World Tamil Movement of Ontario -- had been under the direct control of the Tamil Tigers. The *National Post* reported that "the Canadian government placed the World Tamil Movement on its official list of terrorist entities last June, calling it a front for the Tamil Tigers and accusing it of using threats and intimidation to elicit donations from Canadians of Sri Lankan origin."⁴¹ Another recent article described Canadian government activities in this area as follows: "Last fall... a counterterrorism team disrupted ceremonies in Toronto celebrating the Tamil Tigers by discouraging owners of halls from renting to pro-Tiger groups, and by making themselves obvious in parking lots. The latter measure gave Tamil families who had been pressured to come an excuse to stay away."⁴² While the Committee's mandate does not extend to domestic law enforcement, it strongly urges the government to look again at how it --in cooperation with other jurisdictions --can best stop reported illegal activities in support of the LTTE by what members are convinced is a small minority within the Canadian Tamil community.

Sustaining International Attention and Efforts

Finally, whatever Canada and other countries do in response to the current crises in Sri Lanka, they must take to heart the warning of David Cameron who told Members:

⁴¹ Stewart Bell, "Charity in Tiger Control; Police; Dossier Released; Tamil Group Told to Raise \$7 Million, Mounties Allege," *National Post*, April 16, 2009.

⁴² Daniel Stoffman, "Are We Safe Yet? *The Walrus*, May 2009, p.39.

...frankly, Sri Lanka is a very small country, a little island in the Indian Ocean. It's not the cockpit of conflict that the Middle East is, for example, so it's easy for it to recede from consciousness. So one of the tricks I think would be for this issue of Sri Lanka and the just treatment of the minorities there to remain in the consciousness of the international community.

That's going to be a challenge, but I think it's very important that those words be spoken and that pressure be imposed on them, even if, in the short run, it doesn't have a great deal of impact.⁴³

The Committee accepts this both as a call to keep the issue of Sri Lanka on the Canadian and international agenda, and to continue to act even when success does not seem certain. As Noor Nizam, a Tamil-speaking Muslim originally from Sri Lanka told members, "peace is not for us, it is for the next generation."⁴⁴

⁴³ *Evidence*, Meeting No. 12, March 30, 2009.

⁴⁴ *Evidence*, Meeting No. 13, April 1, 2009.

APPENDIX A LIST OF WITNESSES

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<p>Association of Sri Lankan Graduates of Canada (ASGC) Yoga Arulnamby, President Raj Thavaratnasingham, Executive Committee Member</p> <p>Canadian Red Cross Susan Johnson, Director General International Operations Faisal Mahboob, Program Manager Pakistan and Sri Lanka, International Operations</p> <p>Carleton University Elliot Tepper, Distinguished Senior Fellow and Senior Research Fellow Norman Paterson School of International Affairs and Centre for Security and Defence Studies</p> <p>Saint Paul University Kenneth Bush, Assistant Professor Conflict Studies Program</p>	2009/03/23	10
<p>Canadian Tamil Congress David Poopalapillai Public Relations Director and National Spokesperson Sharmila Rajasingam, Member Harini Sivalingam, Policy Director</p> <p>World Vision Canada Jonathan Papoulidis, Senior Policy Advisor Peacebuilding and Humanitarian Affairs</p> <p>As an individual Robert Dietz, Asia Program Coordinator Committee to Protect Journalists</p>	2009/03/25	11
<p>Acadia University Bruce Matthews, Professor Emeritus</p> <p>Sri Lanka United National Association of Canada Mahinda Gunasekera, President Asoka Weerasinghe, Member</p> <p>University of Toronto David R. Cameron, Chair Department of Political Science</p>	2009/03/30	12

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<p>McMaster University Alexandre Sévigny, Associate Professor Department of Communication Studies and Multimedia</p>	2009/04/01	13
<p>Sri Lanka United National Association of Canada Muttukumar Chandrakumaran Hasaka Ratnamalala, Executive Committee Member</p>		
<p>Tamil Catholic Mission in Montreal Andrew Thavarajasingam, Reverend Father</p>		
<p>As an individual Noor Nizam</p>		

APPENDIX B LIST OF BRIEFS

Organizations and Individuals

As an individual Thavaraj, Kumudhini
Tamil Catholic Mission Andrew Thavarajasingam, Reverend Father
in Montreal

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant Minutes of Proceedings ([Meetings Nos.10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Kevin Sorenson, MP

Chair