

09-10-2017

Rev. Richard Huleatt
Chairperson, Trustees of Jaffna College Funds

Dear Rev. Huleatt,

Regarding Jaffna College and Its Board of Directors

Greetings from Vaddukoddai!

The College that is known today as Jaffna College was founded in the 19th century in Vaddukoddai. Following the closure of Batticotta Seminary, many people from our villages and other parts of Jaffna played a major role in establishing Jaffna College in 1872. The local people were keen that a new College should be inaugurated in our region. Several books authored by American missionaries and other documents available today bear testimony to the fact that the people of our village too made financial contribution, in the amount of what their economic strength permitted at the time, towards the establishment of Jaffna College in 1872 and its future development.

When the locals took the lead in establishing an educational institution in what was then known in English as Batticotta, the American missionaries who were being engaged in religious, social and educational work in the Northern part of Ceylon at the time extended their full support to the local community and its efforts. Encouraging this local endeavor, the missionaries, with the help of their friends, began to raise funds for this institution in the US. Moreover, they gave for the use of the new institution, the buildings that were then being used by the Mission. The alumni of Batticotta Seminary also played a leading role in the establishment of Jaffna College. The Seminary's last Principal Rev. Dr. Hastings was appointed as the first Principal of Jaffna College. We acknowledge the role of the Seminary in the establishment and development of Jaffna College.

We remember with gratitude our forefathers whose hard work resulted in the creation of Jaffna College, and the American missionaries who supported them in their efforts. We, the people of Vaddukoddai and the neighboring villages, express our wholehearted thanks to the Trustees of Jaffna College Funds for safeguarding and multiplying the funds collected for this College. Owing to your efforts, Jaffna College has been able to offer educational services to the people of our region for the past 145 years without any disruption.

Many who have graduated from this College, where our forefathers were taught in both Tamil and English, today excel in a wide-range of fields including medicine, engineering, law, accounting, banking, education, journalism, teaching, technology, business and sports in many parts of the world.

The alumni of this College have also participated struggles against racism, class exploitation, caste discrimination in both Sri Lanka and abroad. Many have also been actively involved in self-determination, feminist and human rights movements and worked tirelessly to bring about meaningful social changes. It is remarkable that the Youth Congress of Jaffna, an anti-colonial

movement of the early 20th century that promoted ethnic, linguistic and cultural pluralism, secular values and social justice, was inaugurated at Jaffna College. Historians consider it as one of the most progressive movements that struggled against British colonialism in Ceylon.

Jaffna College offered education to children from lower middle class and agrarian households, students from oppressed caste communities and women in an environment where everyone was treated in a just and fair manner without discrimination or prejudice. As a result, there emerged in Vaddukoddai and the villages around it a well-educated community in the past century. This community had showed an abiding interest in both arts and sports and was bilingual to some extent.

Arbitrary decisions made by the Board of Directors of Jaffna College in the recent years have posed a threat to the integrity of the school and tarnished its reputation and image locally and globally. It is obvious that there have been many irregularities in the appointment of teachers for the past several years. Those who are close to the Board of Directors and their relatives have been employed at Jaffna College. Some teachers at Jaffna College are teaching our children subjects that they are not qualified to teach. For instance, those who obtained Science degrees are teaching in the Primary School. Subjects like English and Science in the senior school are taught by those who do not have appropriate qualifications or long-term training in teaching those subjects. Once Jaffna College was famous in the country for English education. But today, regrettably, those who teach English to our children lack basic qualifications in teaching the subject. The community finds it shocking that the administrators who handle the time table give no serious thought to the qualifications of the teachers when they make subject allocations. As the teachers fail to cover the whole syllabus within the stipulated timeframe, our children are forced to attend private tuition centers. As a result, they are unable to participate in extra-curricular activities. It is the private tuition centers rather than the school that play a major role in helping our children obtain good grades in the public examinations today. The school has lost its purpose. Without proper upkeep, the buildings, laboratories and the playground remain neglected. We note with pain that some teachers even use the school for their private business purposes.

It is our firm belief that the quality of education provided by Jaffna College and the extra-curricular activities conducted at the school will improve, if dedicated and competent persons are appointed to the Board, administration and faculty. This will also contribute to the development of our villages.

We are aware that the Trustees, after carefully looking into the complaints about administrative malpractices that happened at Jaffna College in the recent past, reduced the funds allocated to Jaffna College for the first three quarters of the current year by 20%. You have also emphasized in your communications that the administration of the school and its Board should act in a democratic, transparent and truthful manner. The Board of Directors have not responded positively to many of your reasonable proposals for change; instead they are prolonging the deadlock in an irresponsible manner. The reforms that you have presented in your letters will lead to constructive changes. They are necessary for the development of the school and to preserve its integrity.

You have repeatedly emphasized in your communications that the governance of the school should be conducted in a transparent manner. But the Board of Directors have not even provided a copy of the constitution of the Board to Mr. Kanagaratnam Sugash, the alumni representative to the Board and an eminent lawyer in Jaffna who hails from our village. We are aware that he made several requests for the copy of the constitution. This shows the lack of integrity on the part of the Board of Directors. We condemn this undemocratic conduct of the Board of Directors and note that at Jaffna College even the student leaders are elected democratically every year by the students of the school.

In the meantime, we learn that parliamentarian Mr. M.A. Sumanthiran recently met some members of the Trustees of Jaffna College Funds in the US and held discussions with you on matters related to Jaffna College and its Board of Directors. Mr. M.A. Sumanthiran has no official connection with the school. He did not study at Jaffna College; nor had he shown any interest in the affairs of the school until recently. The decision to send someone who had no official role in the school to meet the Trustees reveals the dishonest nature of the Board of Directors. We are aware that Sumanthiran appears on behalf of the Chairman of the Board of Directors in the court cases that the latter is currently facing. We therefore consider Mr. Sumanthiran's views on the school and the Board biased.

Board members Dr. Chelvi Selliah, Mrs. Suganthy Vyasinghe, Ms. Vijula Arulanantham and Rev. Pathmathayalan are based in Colombo. They do not engage the people in the village about their children's education or the welfare of the school. Some of them come to Vaddukoddai only to attend the Board meetings. Ms. Vijula Arulanantham even tried to defend and justify the Board's decision to change the long-standing tradition whereby the Principal of the College chaired the annual prize day. The meetings of the Board sometimes take place in Colombo. We wonder why the Board meetings of Jaffna College, a school situated at Vaddukoddai, should take place in Colombo.

When the Board comprises persons who come from different parts of the country, with diverse ideas, we agree that the school can benefit immensely from their expertise and experience. There is no doubt they can certainly contribute to the development of the school. But we suspect that the current Board nominates those who are outside of Jaffna, individuals who have no awareness of the history and the traditions of the College, and persons who have no understanding about and interest in the communities that benefit from the school as Board members with the hidden intention of weakening the local community's stake in the affairs of the school. When people who do not interact well with the larger community that benefits from the school are appointed to the Board, it becomes difficult for us to bring the irregularities that happen at the school to the attention of the Board. This trend has made it possible for the leadership of the Board and a few other dominant individuals to act according to their whims and fancies with sheer disregard for transparency and without a sense of responsibility towards the larger community.

Jaffna College has contributed in many ways to the creation of a healthy environment in Vaddukoddai and the neighboring villages where Hindus and Christians could stand shoulder to shoulder and show respect towards one another in their everyday lives without threatening the diversity of the region. We are aware that the Board in their responses to your communications

tends to create the impression that some of the reforms that you have presented are not appropriate for a Christian institution. We consider this as a tactic to cover up their dishonest practices.

We, the people of Vaddukoddai, desire Jaffna College to continue as a Christian institution that gives importance to such values as love, mercy, honesty, truthfulness, respect for all and inclusiveness that Christianity upholds. We would like to note that even when the school was governed by trustworthy Boards in the past, it remained as a Christian institution.

The people of Vaddukoddai and the neighboring villages who have been historically benefitted from the educational services offered by Jaffna College have lost faith in the current Board. Today, the Board has become a place for individuals who are dishonest and involved in corruption. Therefore, we, the people of Vaddukoddai, believe the Trustees should send their funds to the school through an alternative group of trustworthy individuals. It is our wish that an alternative body of this kind should eventually become the Board that governs Jaffna College.

When Jaffna College was founded as a result of the efforts made by the people in the North, it was envisioned as a non-denominational Christian institution. The 1894 founding charter of the school states this vision clearly. Yet, over time, a majority of the positions on the Board came to be held by members of the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India. The main reason for the problems that the school is facing today is that the powers of the Board are concentrated in the hands of a few members of a single church. In order to address some of the current administrative problems, Jaffna College should again be made a non-denominational Christian institute that cannot be monopolized by any of the churches in the future. The body that would govern the school in the future should include members of all the major Protestant churches in the North.

This body should also include educationists. Many alumni of Jaffna College today work as academics at the University of Jaffna and other universities in Sri Lanka. Many others serve as Principals at state-run schools and officers and directors of Education at various levels. Some have retired after rendering their educational services for several decades. These educationists, too, can offer guidance to the administration of the College. Bankers among the alumni can assist the school in financial administration. Alumni members with expertise in Law can offer legal counsel to the school whenever needed. The school may also receive the services of those who are involved in human rights and social justice activism for its development.

It is not necessary that all members of the governing body of the school should be alumni of the College. Parents must be allowed to play their due role in the new body. Towards this end, a Parents' Association should be established at Jaffna College.

Our community has many competent and honest persons with innovative thinking who can lead the school in line with the Christian values that it upheld in the past. We firmly believe they can take Jaffna College to greater heights. Such persons have no place in the Board of Directors today. While there are many such people in our community, this historically important educational institution is now regrettably in the hands of a group of individuals who are arrogant, selfish and have no concern for the school and the community that it caters to. Those of us from

the region who have received education from this institution for several generations are saddened to see the current predicament of the school. We kindly request you to take all efforts to ensure that the school's Board is in the safe hands of responsible persons. Only a change of this kind can usher in a progressive era at Jaffna College. In closing this message, we wish to state that we will certainly support all the efforts taken by the Trustees towards bringing about this change.

Thank you.