

# GLOBAL TAMILS CIVIL SOCIETY

for Democracy, Development, Peace and Justice

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Dear Mr Annamalai

We welcome you to the United Kingdom, on behalf of the 600,000 strong British Tamil community and thank you for honouring us with your presence at our event.

The bond between the Peoples of Eelam and Tamil Nadu is deeply rooted in our shared history, language, and culture. Despite geographical boundaries, our communities have maintained a strong connection that transcends borders. The Tamil language acts as a unifying force, enabling communication and cultural exchange. Throughout history, Tamils from both regions have supported each other in each other's socio-political struggles, recognizing the importance of solidarity and shared aspirations. This bond is further strengthened through familial ties, trade, and the exchange of artistic expressions, fostering a sense of kinship and mutual understanding. The enduring bond between the Tamils in Eelam and Tamil Nadu is a testament to the power of shared heritage and serves as a reminder of the enduring ties that connect people across borders.

India's involvement in the Tamil struggle in Sri Lanka has been significant and multifaceted. From supporting those who fought for their freedom, to deploying boots on the ground and signing an international treaty and pursuing the implementation of the treaty India has a long history of involvement in Sri Lanka. Despite the complex outcomes, India's involvement has always reflected the fine balancing act it had to perform towards fostering friendly bilateral relationship with its neighbouring state, its commitment to protecting Tamil interests and maintaining stability in the region.

The different segments of Tamils in and from Eelam have suffered beyond imagination. Tamils in the island have been facing genocide especially, in the Hill Country (Malayaham) Tamils have been without access to basic needs such as education, employment or equality. Thirty years of war had destroyed the economy of the North & East of Sri Lanka. We had only three large factories in the North & East prior to the war-, namely Kankesanthurai(KKS) Cement factory, Paranthan chemical factory and Valaichenai Paper factory and gave employment to a few thousand people and all these three factories were destroyed during the war. We urge the Indian Government to set up suitable factories in these areas to create employment for the war victims.

On this important event at which we have come together as Tamils, we wish to put forward three requests to you. We urge you to put forward and advocate for the following requests with the Bharatiya Janata Party leadership heralding a brighter future for the Tamils of Eelam origin in both India and Sri Lanka.

1 - We believe that the political solution that delivers lasting peace will not only have to be acceptable to the Tamils in the island but also to India, especially considering India's growing strategic interests.

The Tamils in the island of Sri Lanka have an inherent right to self-determination as a distinct people in possession of the traditional homeland in the island which can never be extinguished. This has been recognised in the 1987 Indo-Lanka agreement. Furthermore, as a matter of international law, the right revives in any people, currently living within a state in a definite territory, when subjected to discrimination or oppression.

The Tamils in the island believe devolution through a federated model built on the Thimbu principles namely, recognition of the Tamils as a Nation, the existence of an identified Tamil homeland, and the right to self-determination, would usher in lasting peace and reconciliation to the island. The Tamils have long sought greater autonomy and self-governance to protect their distinct identity, language, and culture from colonisation, discrimination and marginalisation and genocide by the Sinhalese state. Tamils believe that a federal system would provide us with the necessary political power and resources to address our grievances and protect our language, culture, religion, identity and interests. This demand is a way to ensure equitable representation and secure the socio-political rights of the Tamil people within the broader framework of Sri Lanka.

We understand Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi is a huge advocate of Cooperative Federalism. It's not surprising given it has been the panacea that has brought disparate communities together not only in India but across the world from Canada, Belgium and Switzerland to Australia.

A famous quote from Thirumanthiram says, Yaam Petra Inpam, Peruga Ivayyagam, meaning let the world also experience the pleasure that I experience in my life. We hope India follows these wise words and supports the Tamils with their call for a federal solution for the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

2 - Following Sri Lanka's independence in 1948, Malayaha Tamils faced challenges in obtaining citizenship and voting rights. The Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948 rendered them stateless, and subsequent legislation like the Ceylon (Parliamentary Elections) Amendment Act of 1949 further limited their political participation. These restrictions were only partially resolved with the Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act of 1949 and subsequent agreements between India and Sri Lanka. Even after gaining citizenship, they have faced difficulties in securing land tenure and obtaining titles. Land encroachments and forced evictions have also been reported, leading to displacement and landlessness within the community.

There has also been historical and ongoing discrimination against the Tamil language and limited access to education in Tamil for the Malayaha Tamil community. This has contributed to educational disparities and hindered their upward mobility. Their limited political clout has resulted in inadequate attention to their specific needs and concerns. The lack of adequate representation has impeded their ability to address their socioeconomic challenges through legislative means.

We urge the Government of India to deliver economic support to the Malayaha Tamils to empower them as a community to promote development.

3 – Whilst we recognize and are thankful to the Indian Government, Tamil Nadu State Government and Tamil Nadu people for providing shelter and support to a significant number of Tamil refugees over the years, the Tamils who fled the brutal war in Sri Lanka and sought protection in Tamil Nadu have been languishing in refugee camps for decades.

They face challenges in obtaining legal status and citizenship in India. Initially, many were classified as "illegal immigrants," which restricted their rights and access to public services. Over the years, some have been granted resident permits, but the process has been complex and time-consuming.

They encounter many challenges in integrating into the local society in Tamil Nadu due to discrimination. Social acceptance and inclusion have been ongoing issues for the community.

They face barriers to education and employment. Limited access to quality education and vocational training has hindered their prospects for higher education and professional development. Employment opportunities have also been limited, often resulting in low-wage jobs and economic insecurity.

Some Eelam Tamil refugees have expressed a desire to return to their homeland once the situation improves. However, repatriation efforts have faced hurdles, including concerns over safety, lack of infrastructure, and difficulties in reclaiming property and livelihoods. The uncertainty surrounding the repatriation process has added to the struggles faced by those seeking to return to Sri Lanka. As we are British Tamils, we were given the opportunity to develop and integrate into the UK. This was made possible by the UK Government by issuing proper immigration and citizenship status to the Tamil refugees in the UK. We respectfully urge you to provide the same legal status and opportunities to our brothers and sisters who have sought protection in India.

We urge the Government of India to expedite the return who wish to return to Sri Lanka and issue those who wish to remain in Tamil Nadu with citizenship and help integrate them into the wider society providing them a brighter future in their host country.

Thanking you,  
Global Tamils Civil Society

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