



STRONGERTOGETHER

CONGRESS

Irish Congress of Trade Unions

4 April 2011

Mr Eamon Gilmore, TD
Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs
Government Buildings
Merrion Street
Dublin 2

Dear Tánaiste,

I am writing to you regarding the situation in Sri Lanka. Two years ago the Sri Lankan Army defeated the Tamil Tigers. But this was also a war against hundreds of thousands of innocent civilian Tamils. The United Nations estimates that up to 8000 people were killed during the bombardment; other sources claim that more than 20,000 people were killed. There are several reports about serious war crimes committed by the Sri Lankan Army. We also know that around 300,000 Tamils were interned without trial in concentration camps where there was no freedom of movement of the displaced and not enough water, food and sanitation. Thousands of people are still, two years later, detained without charges or trial. Many prisoners have been tortured or killed in custody.

On the 9th of March Amnesty International released a report where they sharply Sri Lanka's so called national security laws, and in particular the prevention of terrorism act which is used to harass, intimidate and punish critical voices. Sam Zarifiri, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Director has declared that thousands of people are languishing in detention without charge or trial under these laws, outside even the protections offered by the Sri Lankan legal system and in clear violation of recognized international human rights standards.

In the past there were also obvious reasons to sharply criticise the Tamil Tigers for being responsible for terrorist actions and breaching principles of human rights. According to the Sri Lankan government the Tamil Tigers were completely defeated in the war and no longer exist. However the government's violence against the Tamil people continues. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions feels a deep sympathy with the Tamil people's legitimate demand for human and national rights, and at our last Biennial Delegates Conference (7-10 July 2009) in Tralee a motion asking for intensified solidarity work with the Tamils in Sri Lanka was adopted.

32 Parnell Square
Dublin 1
T +353 1 8897777
F +353 1 8872012
congress@ictu.ie
www.ictu.ie

We kindly ask you to urge the Sri Lankan government:

- To immediately release those arrested, unless they are charged with recognizably criminal offences and remanded in custody by a civilian court;
- To repeal the emergency regulations and the Prevention of Terrorism Act to bring them;
- into line with international human rights law and standards;
- To adhere to the 2006 Presidential Directive by registering detainees, and informing their families and the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission of the place of arrest.

The basic and historic reason for the oppression of the Tamil people must also be addressed for a lasting peaceful solution in Sri Lanka. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions hopes that the Irish government can take new initiatives on the international level, and within the European Union, to recreate internationally supervised and UN supported negotiations between the government of Sri Lanka and representatives of the Tamil people. The goal for these negotiations must be to find a solution which respects the human and national rights of both the Sinhalese and the Tamil people.

Yours sincerely



David Begg
General Secretary

db/es