

MULTI-FAITH SERVICE FOR VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE IN SRI LANKA

**Notes for Hon David Kilgour
Ben Franklin Place Chamber, CentrepoinTE Drive.**

Ottawa

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This is the sixth commemoration of the tragedies that occurred in Sri Lanka over many years. Various Tamil associations and others observe a week of remembrance between May 11th and 18th remembering those who lost their lives and praying for peace and closure for all who lost family and other loved ones.

When the war ended on May 19, 2009, tens of thousands of persons had lost their lives. Many Tamil Canadians, including ones living in Ottawa and across Canada, lost family members.

In early June, 2009, I visited Sri Lanka as a member of an international delegation. The purpose of the visit, sponsored by the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), was to learn what its network of churches in 128 countries could do to assist with the humanitarian crisis and national reconciliation.

Christian churches across Sri Lanka appeared well placed for bridge-building, being institutions which enjoyed and maintain today a good mix of members from both the Sinhalese and Tamil communities.

Here is my observation from the visit, which appears from news and other sources to apply in varying degrees today:

Major efforts are still required to address the widespread traumas resulting from violence, which left up to 100,000 persons from both major cultural communities dead and hundreds of thousands displaced. The main obstacle remains the legacy of bitterness on both sides, after more than three decades of on-and-off hostilities and worsened by outrageous military actions at the end of the war.

A cabinet minister we met opened the meeting with the comment that it was “a time for healing, a time to rebuild trust”. He added that one of the keys to future national security for Sri Lanka is a repaired relationship between the government and Sri

Lankan diasporas living across the world.

Within Canada, major efforts must still be made to facilitate a dialogue between the members of our Sinhalese and Tamil communities, who could play a pivotal role in reconciliation within Sri Lanka. In conversations with persons from both communities before and after the 2009 mission, it is evident that there exists a strong desire for peace, although the grievances and misunderstandings are also very much present.

President Sirisena

Like many, I think it was a democratic miracle that Mahinda Rajapaksa, the incumbent president since 2005, was defeated for re-election earlier this year by Maithripala Sirisena. Rajapaksa and his brothers had given the impression of settling into power permanently. It appears that his wish for a coup was thwarted by the Attorney-general, chief justice, the army and many other democrats across Sri Lanka.

As the *Economist* observed, Sirisena's victory was "a triumph for democracy after a long drift towards corrupt authoritarianism. The new president... is the first leader in two decades to have the backing of Tamils and Muslims as well as a large number of the country's Sinhalese majority... This will help him in the task of bringing about reconciliation still lacking six years after the end of a brutal civil war..."

Dalai Lama

His Holiness the Dalai Lama, an Honorary Canadian Citizen, always says that when we look at a supposed enemy, we should always try to think that the other person is also seeking happiness as we are. That realization should open up our minds and hearts. He says conflicts arise out of exaggerated fear about the other. But we can't survive alone.

Interdependence is key to human survival, His Holiness says. So all conflicts should and must be resolved through dialogue keeping interdependence in mind.

Conclusion

I congratulate the National Capital Region Tamil Association (NCRTA) in calling for observance of a week of remembrance between May 11th and May 18th to remember those who lost their lives in the conflict. We all pray that peace and reconciliation will come to Sri Lanka soon.

Thank you.
