Dispersed by War
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SPECIAL REPORT

Dispersed by War

Fourteen years of bitter civil war between Sinhalese Buddhists and Tamil Hindus forced 700,000 Tamils to flee Sri Lanka. What began as a temporary diaspora in search of safety has become, for most, a permanent resettlement. Many are asking themselves, will their Hindu religion and culture survive?

In 1975 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimated 2.5 million refugees worldwide. Today the UNHCR reckons there are 27 million refugees from war and political, religious or ethnic persecution in 140 countries. The 700,000 Tamils--one-third of Sri Lanka's pre-war Tamil population--are a small part of this global displacement. Many refugees, such as the six million who fled Afghanistan at the height of conflicts there, wait out hostilities in neighboring countries. Similarly, 200,000 Tamils, according to international relief agencies (100,000 by Sri Lanka government count), are waiting in India. India has no intention of allowing this community to remain. When the war is over, whether next year or next decade, they will be sent home.

A half-million Tamils have fled around the globe. This group, too, thought their asylum temporary. But the prospect of

peace is no closer now than ten years ago. Slowly, this reality is being acknowledged. Those in countries that offer citizenship, such as Canada, Australia and Denmark, are actively taking it. Those in nations without this option, such as Switzerland, are finding their way to places with more settlement opportunities. Economic crisis, especially rising unemployment, in potential host countries and the unprecedented global flood of refugees has caused even previously hospitable societies such as Canada to restrict entry.

How did all these people enter so many different countries on Sri Lanka passports? For security reasons, those directly involved tend to wax vague when pressed for details. Several tragedies have inadvertently revealed some of the methods. The most recent was the apparent sinking of a boat and unconfirmed drowning of 209 refugees--including 50 Tamils--in the Mediterranean on December 25, 1996. Police reports disclose the Tamils had paid US$8,000 each to a Colombo "agent" to be transported by air to Cairo and then by boat to Italy. On November 23, nine Tamils died aboard the hijacked Ethiopian airliner that crashed into the ocean off Comoros. According to news reports, this group had flown from Colombo to Singapore to Nigeria. They were deported from Nigeria and flown to Mumbai where they were refused entry and sent away on the doomed flight to Lagos. In July, 1994, Europe was stunned when 18 Sri Lankans suffocated while locked in a shipping container abandoned in Hungary. They were being smuggled from Russia into Europe. Each had paid $7,600 to be flown from Colombo to Moscow and transported through Eastern Europe. Until 1985, the favored route was through East Berlin, from where it was easy to enter West Berlin. Until 1989, parents could take the desperate method of sending

children as young as five or six to Germany directly, as visas were not required for those under 16. Unaccompanied children usually arrived with only the phone number of a relative or family friend.

Whatever the route, the resulting reality is a foreign country with a different climate, language, culture and diet. Adjustments are hard, but Tamil refugees are as resourceful as they are desperate. The first order of business is survival--housing, jobs, schooling for the children. Somewhere down the list comes the need to establish culture and religion and successfully transmit it to the next generation--initially by language classes. Such transmission of religion and culture in an alien environment is certainly possible, though most Hindu Tamils expressed to our journalists no clear idea how they would do it. Catholics have moved their religion from country to country with little dilution, as have the Muslims. In both cases a trained priesthood and lay ministry see to the systematic teaching of children, and oversee the necessary adjustments.

In this global survey, Hinduism Today spoke with Sri Lankan Tamil leaders in more than a dozen nations who candidly described their situation and the future. Each lamented the daily agony of knowing their family and friends suffer back in their beloved homeland, Lanka, yet they can do nothing about it. This harsh reality overshadows daily life, even as displaced families adjust to new and safer environs.

Commonwealth Settlers

Most Tamils flee to English-speaking countries

Approximately 160,000 Sri Lanka Tamils now live in Canada--7 percent of the island's pre-war Tamil population and the largest concentration in the Western world. Toronto alone has 125,000--by far the biggest and most stable of all expatriate Hindu communities. "Canadians are very favorable toward the refugees," said Tiru Rajaratnam Gunanathan, secretary of the Tamil Eelam Society of Canada. But, faced with a flood of refugees from many countries, even Canada has in the last two years begun restricting entry.

Arriving refugees live on welfare for six months, according to Gunanathan, and by then have gotten one, two or even three jobs in factories, bakeries, restaurants or as security guards. Even qualified doctors, engineers and teachers start like this. "There are mixed feelings among Canadians about the refugees," he said. "Some care a lot. Others detest refugees, thinking they have come to grab jobs." Tamil and Somali refugees far outnumber all others. "We are treated as illiterates because people in Canada don't yet realize Tamils are highly educated," the respected elder complained. At Toronto University, 35 percent of all engineering students are Sri Lankan Tamils. Conversion, he said, is not much of a problem here.

"The religious tradition is very strong," states Gunanathan. "There is hardly a weekend on which you will not have several Hindu programs. On the Tamil New Year, in April, you can't get near the temple. You have to park two miles away, take a shuttle bus, then squeeze into the temple." Temples are built in collaboration with the larger Indian Hindu community, though Sri Lankan Tamils are among the prime movers. As to religious education, "The Hindu teaching given is at a very high

or very low level. There is nothing for the middle class of people," said Gunanathan.

Tamil language study is a primary concern, as the children live in an almost entirely English-speaking enclave. "Even the children of some of our priests don't speak Tamil," said Gunanathan. "Many give up trying to teach it because of the environment in which children grow up." Child welfare is the hardest thing to deal with, admits Gunanathan. "When we were in Sri Lanka, we punished children, caned them, to keep them under control. But when the child first goes to school in Canada he is told, 'If your mother or father hits you, dial 911 [the police].' Here you cannot beat a child."

"North Indians, Chinese, Vietnamese all speak their language and maintain their culture," the elder observed. "But we Tamils want to speak English at home, be Westernized, look like any other Canadian. Yet, my Portuguese neighbor speaks Portuguese. In thirty years in Canada he has never bothered to learn English." One can meet Hindu children raised in Canada with no religious or cultural education who are indistinguishable from ordinary Canadians, except for their darker skin. A concerted effort is needed to avoid this becoming the norm.

The 35,000 Lankan Tamils in nearby USA came as professionals, or under the family reunification program. They are a prosperous, even elite, community. US immigration has consistently refused asylum status except when forced by the courts. As a result, the country is a mere waystation for Tamils enroute to Canada, nearly all of whom pass through the US.

The greatest number of Lankan Tamils in Europe live in the United Kingdom. According to a UK publisher and elder, 100,000 Lankan Tamils and one million Indians live among the Brits. A sizeable group was present in 1983, before the war, and this has facilitated the flow of refugees. Most Sri Lankan refugees live in the London area. London is prospering as no other city on Earth! Immigration is a major political issue in this ethnically troubled country. The small island nation is dealing with millions of former colonial subjects. Early Lankan arrivals were mostly professionals, now established as engineers, accountants and teachers. More recent immigrants are generally less educated and accept menial jobs.

Hinduism is well established in the UK, with many Hindu organizations, temples, newspapers and even three professional Tamil poets. Sri Lankans have blended effortlessly into this stable infrastructure and been instrumental in building several new temples. Many brahmin priests from the homeland are performing daily rites and teaching the religion. There are a number of schools and independent teachers of language, music, dance, etc. Still, said the elder, "We have doubts whether the second generation will be strong Hindus." Tamil parents emphasize education, and their children's entering the professions.

Thirty thousand Sri Lankan Tamils have fled to Australia. A liberal family reunification program allowed many to legally join relatives already in the country in 1983, resulting in an exponential growth, according to Jai Maheswaran, 38, of Melbourne. He is world coordinator of the Tamils Rehabilitation Organization. About 30 percent of the total came as refugees. Now the situation has changed, and "every attempt is made to

discourage immigrants, regardless of where they are coming from," said Maheswaran.

The government does not offer much help directly, but it is relatively easy to get established. Those coming for family reunification are well-educated people who easily move among Australia's middle- and upper middle-class, observed Maheswaran.

Most Hindu temples in Australia--and every major city has one or more--came up after the exodus. Sri Lankans joined with Indian groups to start them. "Children's classes are planned," said Maheswaran, "but not much is happening yet. The Ceylon Tamil Association in Melbourne and the Tamil Society in Sydney run some Tamil language classes which include children of all faiths and do not teach religion. "The present generation are fervent followers of Hinduism," he said, "and so see to the creation of temples. But the participation of the next generation is only because the parents force them to go. If something doesn't happen very rapidly, the resurgence of Hinduism among Jaffna Tamils won't last long."

Dr. Rasalingam of Auckland, New Zealand, is president of the Ethnic Council and much involved in the care of refugees from all countries. He estimates 2,000 Lankan Tamils are in New Zealand; most entered through official channels. The country, he said, promotes multiplicity and accepts a small yearly allotment of refugees from the UNHRC. Many Tamils in Kiwi Land are professionals; others do factory work.

Yogakumar, 30, came to New Zealand after three years in Canada. He is optimistic about the future of Hindus here. Sri Lankan Tamils in Auckland are planning to build a Ganesha temple. There is a New Zealand Tamil Society and an International Tamil Culture Society which are "working quite well to improve culture and language."

Jaffna Priesthood

Keerimalai brahmin builds new temple for Sri Lankans in Canada

Kumarswami Kurukal is the foremost priest in Toronto. His family was brought centuries ago from Banaras to Sri Lanka by the Jaffna King Vijaya Maharaja to do puja at the now 500-year-old temple of Keerimalai, one of Lanka's five great Siva temples. Keerimalai was destroyed by aerial bombing in 1990. His father, the temple's chief priest, moved to Colombo while Kumarswami, 42, and his wife Chadhayni fled to Canada. Now they are Canadian citizens with a four-year-old, Canadian-born daughter, Bhagavati. He is chief priest and founder of the Canada Kandaswamy Temple in Scarborough. So many Sri Lankan Tamils live in this Toronto suburb that, "every bus you get on has six or seven," says one resident. It is a tribute to the religiosity of the community that virtually all Sri Lankan liturgists who have come to Canada are serving as full-time priests. They are very much in demand, do good service and earn good money, said Gurunathan of Toronto.

Kumarswami started the Kandaswamy Temple as a private enterprise. When it turned into a public trust, he became executive officer. "I have observed that overseas the contact

between devotees and the priest is cut by temple trustees," he said. "But at this temple people can talk to the priest freely and tell their problems." A hundred people visit daily, 1,000 on weekends and more than 5,000 at festival times.

Last Vijaya Dasami, he and 51 other Toronto area priests from Sri Lanka formed the Canada Hindu Priest Society. Their goal is a priest-training school for their children. "There are many temples coming up," said Kumarswami. "We don't want to have to rely on India or Lanka, but have our own trained priests. We are beginning the school to prevent our children from becoming ordinary Canadians and leaving the priesthood." Twenty of the priests are government-approved marriage registrars. On some auspicious days there may be 30 weddings in the Toronto area.

Kumarswami reports that the destruction of the ancient Keerimalai Temple was raised in Sri Lanka's parliament in December, 1996, and a demand made to restore the historic monument. The Sinhalese government promised to look into the matter. The temple, like many others, is in bad condition. "There is no temple in Jaffna which is not damaged," Kumarswami's relatives report. Three people died and many were injured at Keerimalai in the 1990 bombing, during a festival attended by 500 devotees. It was the second aerial attack on the holy shrine. "We were in the midst of a homa to Goddess Amman when the temple was bombed. After it was over, we found the Amman Deity intact, but She had turned and faced the wall." The temple was destroyed centuries ago by the Portuguese Catholics, and rebuilt in the late 19th century. The sea-side sanctuary, which faces India's shore a few miles away, will one day become the responsibility of this

eldest son, who intends to return and restore Siva's home on the island.

The European Experience

Governments struggle with flood of refugees

Switzerland has enjoyed a thousand years of peace and, at 700 years, is the oldest democracy in the world. It has achieved this despite being divided, like Sri Lanka, into regions according to language--German, French and Italian. Switzerland accepts asylum seekers, and cares for them generously, but there is simply no future for them in the country. Of the 40,000 Sri Lankan Tamils there, only a few dozen may ever achieve citizenship, according to the president of the Swiss Hindu Mamandram. About 20 persons a month have been deported back to Sri Lanka, mostly recent arrivals. High unemployment is contributing to a growing Swiss resentment. Peter Wittwer, the government representative in charge of all foreigners in Zurich, commented favorably upon the conduct and religiosity of the Sri Lankans when he attended a large peace ceremony held at Zurich's Sivan Temple.

Employment opportunities are limited. The Mamandram. president, for example, was an accountant and university lecturer in Sri Lanka. Today he is a waiter, managing a restaurant liquor buffet. Even this is considered a step up from the kitchen jobs held by most refugees. Nonetheless, pay is good.

Since 1994 the community has begun a dozen small temples around the country. Many areas have Tamil language and religion classes, but the Mamandram. president was not at all satisfied with the level of education. The temples are staffed by brahmin priests from Sri Lanka who are doing the pujas and samskaras. The priests also have to work, but they appealed to the government and were granted permission to find jobs in flower shops instead of meat- and liquor-serving restaurants.

Christian conversion is a significant problem, and in 1993 the Mamandram. organized a conference to fight it. Even two brahmins have been converted and now go about confusing the people by reciting Sanskrit mantrams and saying, "This mantram is not for Murugan, it is really for Jehovah." Estimates are that 3,000 have been converted.

"We are all Jaffna, our children are half Jaffna/half German, and our fear is the next generation will be all German," laments E. Veeragathiyar, 50, of Berlin. He has been in Germany since 1985 along with his wife and son, 18, and daughter, 16. An accountant in Sri Lanka with a government post, he delivers newspapers in Germany. There are perhaps 50,000 Sri Lanka Tamils in the country, which has been inundated with refugees from many nations, especially the former Yugoslavia. Relations with native Germans are not always smooth, notably in economically depressed East Berlin.

There are about 25 temples staffed with Sri Lankan priests and 40 Tamil schools in Germany. The Siva Temple in Dortmund is extensive. More than 10,000 devotees (including many ethnic Germans) have attended festivals at the Amman temple in

Hamm. Eight Tamil language newspapers and magazines, plus several radio stations, serve the Sri Lankan community.

Conversion is a problem, and economic inducement is the method of choice. One new convert got in trouble with his pastor when he fell down in church and cried out, "Muruga! Muruga!" "Converts are very active and aggressive," said Veeragathiyar, "but after changing faith for jobs and privileges, they still come to the temple and pray to Muruga." Some German churches bring Tamil Catholic priests from India to conduct Mass in Tamil.

Language is the major barrier for the 60,000 refugees in France, according to V. Sanderasekaram, 51, founder and trustee of the Sri Manika Vinayakar Alayam of Paris. Refugees are treated well by the government, he explained, but only 300 have passed the stringent citizenship requirement to read and write French fluently. Like Germany, France is struggling with a huge refugee population and a soaring unemployment rate.

The Tamil community has several temples that celebrate all festivals and provide samskaras. There are also a few language and culture classes. Christianity has claimed about 4,000 converts here, says Sanderasekaram. "They promise to get you a job. But if they can really do it, why don't they help the millions of unemployed French people?" The Christian-dominated country imposes significant restrictions on other religions--for example, no non-Christian place of worship may be identifiable from the street.

Sallaswamy's wife died in the aftermath of the 1983 riots, "for want of medical attention in Colombo," he states, without further elaboration. He was left with three boys, ages six, four and three months. Devastated by his loss, he left the boys with relatives and fled to Europe, ending up in Denmark. Now 54, he lives in Skjern working as a translator for the Danish government with no intention of returning to Lanka. His boys joined him in 1989. His eldest son, Kumaran, now 19, said, "In the beginning it was very hard. We are not always treated well. We have not been learning Hindu religion, except what we read and hear from our father. We've also seen Ramayana and Mahabharata in movies."

The Danes are making a concerted effort to assimilate the 7,000 refugees, but turn away new arrivals. Those accepted are given intensive training in the Danish language for the first 18 months. They are able to gain permanent residence and, after six years, citizenship. Initially almost 2,000 converted to Christianity. Many others were going to Catholic churches and "worshiping the Hindu Gods there since there were no temples," said one devotee. It was observed that these converts tended to leave Christianity after two or three years and float between the two communities. The priests started conducting the Vratyastoma ceremony to formally bring them back into Hinduism.

The Danish government, under the inspiration of Queen Margaret II, has programs in all schools to teach children their mother tongue. Tamil children take Tamil class several times a week from first grade. The first graduates mostly educated in Denmark are entering professions and "showing we can achieve something," said Sallaswamy.

Sivalingam, 63, of Helsinki, was the first to arrive of 100 Sri Lanka Tamils now in Finland, which lies at the northern end of the Baltic Sea between Sweden and Russia. It was easy for him to stay in 1983--once he reached this remote land. He was granted asylum in three weeks, and is now a citizen, as are his wife and three children. Tamils are widely dispersed in the country. He said there is no organization of Tamils, no temples, and outside the home "It is not possible to practice Hinduism." Sivalingam was a research assistant at the University of Helsinki before retiring, and still teaches Tamil there. He gained local fame in 1994 for his Tamil translations of the national epic Kalevala--a book of old Finnish ballads, lyrics and prayers as precious to Finns as the Devaram hymns are to Tamils.

The reception for all refugees in Finland has changed dramatically since 1983. The country is now flooded with thousands of foreigners, including Somalis and others from Africa. Most Tamils in Finland try to move on to other countries. Those that stay are often sent to the North to work--the frigid outpost where nomadic Lapplanders herd reindeer. There they experience the "midnight sun," as the area lies above the Arctic Circle. For 73 days in the summer the sun never sets below the horizon, and for 73 days in winter never rises above it--hardship duty for those born and raised in the balmy tropics. If they can stick it out, each will be granted permanent status, but most try for Canada, Germany or France.

Pirabu of Norway reports there are about 25,000 Tamils in Italy. Some work in vineyards and housekeeping "in very bad conditions." One group is well established near Palermo,

according to the TRO. He believes there were once 30,000 Tamils in the Netherlands, but government pressure forced some 10,000 to leave. Unknown thousands are helplessly stranded in Hungary, Turkey, Poland, Russia and other East European countries, unable to get jobs or move on.

Hindu religious leaders traveling among the displaced Tamils in recent years have encouraged them to settle down in their new country, accept the karma that brought them there, attain citizenship and think about the future of their children. They are beginning to do this. As seen in this report, a certain level of economic security has been attained in most countries. Nearly all refugees are better off than they were in war-torn Lanka--a fact that compounds guilt with daily distress as they worry about family and friends left behind. Communities have recognized that culture, religion and language are not being adequately transmitted to the new generation.

Tamils of the diaspora have begun a unique "peace prayer" at meetings. Each touches the forehead, then raises both arms head-high, palms out, chanting "aum" several times while thinking thoughts of peace and well being. By thus sending energy, prana, back to loved ones in Lanka, they sooth their own emotional strain and subtly serve peace's possibility. In Lanka, too, reports are that people are becoming more religious, turning to God in their hearts and relieving hardship through prayer. Yet real peace remains a distant hope.

Warm Welcome in Cold Norway

Earlier Jaffna project opened doors

A pre-1983 boat-building project in Jaffna sponsored by Norway provided an unexpected access to this Scandanavian country. Tiru N. S. Pirabu of Drammen, a government translator and social worker, reports there are now 8,000 Tamils in Norway, of whom half are citizens. The first batch of Tamils were a thousand students admitted to language school in 1984, as a result of contacts between Jaffna Tamils and government personnel involved in the maritime project. Fifty have graduated as doctors so far, others as engineers--an early example of the second generation moving easily into top professions.

The first arrivals had to make do, however, and as a result are spread all over the country working in restaurants, factories, health and the fish industry. Tamils are respected for their disciplined work habits, and earn enough that most own homes and cars. A recent newspaper report credited them with saving a local industry in the town of Vardo.

Refugees have established five privately funded Tamil schools. Sivadas is principal of the Cultural Center for Tamil children in Oslo. It is a weekend school teaching Tamil language, Hinduism, dance and music. Now in its fifth year, it has 15 teachers and 280 children, ages 3 to 18. All the schools operate in public schools rented at nominal rates from the local municipal council. "This is better than other European countries for Tamils," said Sivadas.

Far Corners

Scattered worldwide by choice or chance

Perhaps 20,000 Lankan Tamils are in Africa, most as contract workers, or "stranded" refugees trying to get to Canada or Europe. Muralitharan is one of 240 contract workers in Botswana, a landlocked desert nation directly above South Africa. They return to Sri Lanka every two or three years to renew their contracts and visas. Their status is "fairly secure," he said. Lankan Tamils are reported in Nigeria, Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. There are 60,000 in the Gulf States, all on temporary contracts. Hindu religious life is difficult in these strict Muslim countries.

A few Lankan Tamils are in Southeast Asia. "Not more than 100 Sri Lankan professionals are in Singapore," reports Dohadeva Shanmuga. There are Tamils stranded in Thailand, the Philippines and Taiwan, according to Dr. Rasalingam. A few contract workers are reported to be in Brunei and Sabah. Some Sri Lankans pass through Malaysia on their way to other countries.

Where Have Lanka's Tamils Found Refuge?

The majority of the Lankan Tamil refugees have found sanctuary in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK, Commonwealth countries wherein their status is most firm. European countries accepted thousands to tens of thousands. Some are well settled, others are unsettled guests. Thousands are stranded in former Eastern Bloc countries, Russia, Africa and Southeast Asia. A sizeable number, 60,000, are contract workers in the Gulf States and some African and Asian countries. India supports 200,000, mostly in camps.

TIMELINE

500 bce: Prince Vijaya and 700 followers from Bengal arrive in Sri Lanka.

300 bce: Sinhalese become Buddhists.

432 ce: Tamil Pandyan king invades.

470: Pandyans ousted by Sinhalese.

1017: Rajaraja Chola annexes Lanka to India.

1070: Sinhalese oust Cholas.

1200: South Indians briefly rule Lanka.

1400: Tamil kingdom founded in Jaffna.

1591: Portuguese gain control of Lanka. Massive Catholic conversion activity follows.

1658: Dutch gain control.

1796: British gain control.

1910: Growth of nationalist movement.

1947: Independence granted; English-educated elite rule the country.

1956: Bandaranaike's SLFP comes to power, Sinhala declared sole official language, state support of Buddhism becomes law.

1959: Bandaranaike assassinated.

1978: Tamil secessionists gain strength.

1983: LTTE kill 14 soldiers; thousands die in organized anti-Tamil riots in Colombo.

1987: India and Sri Lanka sign peace accord with devolution of powers to Tamils. Indian army enters Jaffna.

1990: Peace accord fails, Indian army leaves

1995: Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, admitting Tamils' "legitimate grievances," elected president on peace platform.

1995: Chandrika presents wide-ranging devolution package.

Cease-fire fails.

1996: 400,000 Tamils flee in front of "Operation Riviresa," as army conquers Jaffna.

1997: India sends minister to Colombo with renewed commitment to govt. peace efforts.

PEACE PROSPECTS

Can They Find a Solution?

Mutual distrust remains the biggest hurdle

Sri Lankans elected Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga in 1995 on a platform of peace. She acknowledged that previous governments had not only failed to solve her country's situation, but that their insincere "methods resulted in acts of outright violence." A year and a half later military action has only increased and peace is no closer. At the moment, the Sinhalese hold Jaffna and have the upper hand. But they face continued desertions from their army and periodic military setbacks. The worst of these took place in the fall of 1996 when 1,200 Sinhalese soldiers died in a single attack on the Mullaitivu army base.

Still, ethnic disputes of equal or greater violence are being resolved in other parts of the world. The Israelis and Palestinians are reaching agreements on coexistence in a situation with many parallels to that of Sri Lanka. The Serbs, Croats and Muslims of the former Yugoslavia have finally stopped killing each other--albeit with NATO's heavily-armed encouragement. Parts of the former USSR have peacefully

become independent countries.

Tamil leaders acknowledge that the devolution package initially presented by Chandrika's government is generally acceptable. That plan creates a federation of regions wherein councils would control local police, education, land use, industry and taxation. It grants a level of autonomy similar to that of each state in the USA. But, they say, some third party must take an interest. Who might that be? India has tried in the past. The UN is preoccupied with other conflicts. The oil-less island is low on America's list of priorities. The Tamils have suggested Norway or Canada as a mediator (60 Norwegian observers are guaranteeing the latest Israel-Palestinian agreement). One thing is certain: Unless Sri Lanka gets on the world's agenda, the 14-year-old conflict between two peace-affirming communities, Buddhists and Hindus, will not end soon.

Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga:
President of Sri Lanka , stated August 5, 1995: "Our new approach is predicated on unqualified acceptance of the fact that the Tamil people have genuine grievances for which solutions must be found. We have the mandate to resolve this problem."

Velupillai Prabhakaran:
Leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam told the European Parliament in 1995, "We are convinced that the Tamil national question can be resolved by peaceful means. It is the government which should take the initiative to resume the peace process."