

Australian Tamil Congress 2009 Year End Summary

Since its inception in August, ATC has made great in roads in a short period of time (4 months) due to tireless hard work from dozens of our members.

2009 Year End Summary Report from ATC National Political Affairs Team

The National Political Affairs Team has been working cohesively. The team includes a wing which focuses on women's issues. Regular trips have been made to Canberra by delegates from around Australia. A few important actions carried out by this group during this period are:

1. State-wide groups for political activities have been formed in NSW, VIC, QLD, SA and WA.
2. Political group members from each state have met several MPs and Senators and the details of these meetings were covered separately under the 'state sections' of the newsletter.
3. *A Research, Analysis and Writing Group* has been formed and several important letters sent to key government officials were prepared by members of this group. Other key activities for this group will be carrying out targeted research on selected topics and preparing high quality materials to facilitate lobbying.
4. ATC representatives were a part of the Tamil Delegation that was invited to meet with Foreign Minister Hon. Stephen Smith at DFAT, Canberra on 14 September and conveyed the positions of the Tamil Diaspora. We have continued our close correspondence with DFAT officials.
5. ATC representatives were a part of the Tamil Delegation that met and conveyed the positions of the Tamil Diaspora to The Right Hon Des Browne, British Prime Minister's envoy to Sri Lanka on the 7 November at the British High Commissioner's Residence, Canberra.
6. A letter addressing ATC's position on the refugee/IDP issues and about the 300,000 campaign was dispatched to all MPs and Senators and the follow-up steps including direct meetings with MPs are currently underway.
7. A well-researched and clearly articulated paper, with large contributions from ATC-Vic Chapter, requesting that the human rights abuses in Sri Lanka be addressed at the CHOGM meeting was submitted to the Secretary General of the CHOGM, the Prime Minister of Australia and several other dignitaries connected to the CHOGM. A follow-up acknowledgement was sent to the Prime Minister of Australia following the CHOGM decision to not allow Sri Lanka to host the 2011 CHOGM meeting based on its deplorable human rights record.
8. The Australian Tamil Congress was given a rare opportunity to address the Labor National Security Caucus meeting at the Parliament House on the 23 November. All MPs present were highly sympathetic towards the Tamil issue and their questions and comments clearly conveyed their knowledge on this matter as well as their solidarity with the oppressed Tamil people.
9. ATC Women's Rights Group has been active during this period. Several meetings have taken place with policy makers, MPs and Senators in and outside Canberra. The group raised awareness of the plight of Tamil women and children in the internment camps and the surrounding areas.
10. ATC Women's Rights Group also attended the Refugee Ball and donated shawls to all the speakers - ATC was thanked and mentioned a few times at the event

11. Two human rights forums, one at Melbourne and the other at Brisbane, have been organised by ATC.
12. Twenty two representatives from NSW, VIC, QLD, SA and WA participated in a one day caucus meeting (12 December) at Melbourne to discuss the political strategies for ATC. The outcomes of this meeting will be discussed across the membership in due course.

Year 2009 marked a major turning point in the history of the Tamil struggle for equality and freedom in the island of Sri Lanka. This year brought immeasurable losses, disappointments, and sadness to all Tamils. Despite the enormity of the loss the Tamils across the world have risen with admirable resilience and noticeable flexibility to deal with their on-going political and human rights issues.

The internationalisation of our struggle is possibly the only positive outcome of the recent military debacles and the mild but consistent messages from the west regarding GSP+, CHOGM hosting privileges and possible war crimes inquiries give us some much needed comfort. Unexpectedly changed political scenario in Sri Lanka could also be significant.

It is the Tamil Diaspora's duty to use every available opportunity and then to create more for achieving justice, peace, freedom and prosperity for our Tamil brethren living in Sri Lanka.

2009 Year End Summary Report from ATC Queensland State Chapter

1. ATC-Qld Chapter was officially launched by Sen. Mark Furner, Senator for Queensland on 16 August
2. On 14 September, ATC-Qld Chapter representative went to Canberra to participate in the meeting with Foreign Minister Hon. Stephen Smith
3. ATC-Qld Chapter representatives have since met with several Queensland Senators and MPs; ATC was accompanied by our comrades from Socialist Alliance at these meetings
4. On 20 October, ATC-Qld Chapter representative addressed the ALP Woolwin Branch meeting on the "Asylum Seeker" issue; subsequently a resolution was passed in November 2009
5. ATC-Qld Chapter representatives were interviewed on several occasions on local radio
6. On 7 November, ATC-Qld Chapter representatives went to Canberra to participate in the meeting with Des Browne, the UK Special Envoy to Sri Lanka
7. ATC-Qld Chapter representative addressed five separate church gatherings on this issue
8. ATC-Qld Chapter corresponds with Socialist Alliance, Qld
9. ATC-Qld Chapter regularly liaises with Amnesty International, Qld
10. ATC-Qld Chapter members greeted Tamil asylum seekers as they arrived in Brisbane Airport. They will be in close liaison with these individuals to assist them with settling into Australia

2009 Year End Summary Report from ATC South Australia State Chapter

1. ATC-SA Chapter was officially launched on 15 August
2. Three subgroups have been formed to execute our chapter work effectively: membership drive, fund raising and promotion of ATC mission
3. ATC-SA Chapter continues to publish fortnightly news briefs for our members

4. The political lobby work that had been executed by the Action Committee of Ceylon Tamil Association was handed over to ATC SA Chapter committee. We have since met with State and Federal politicians. We would like to acknowledge CTA Action committee for their fund-raising which has been very useful in carrying out our political activities without much financial strain on the ATC-SA chapter
5. On 10 October, ATC-SA Chapter organised a Multicultural Extravaganza. Invited chief guests were State Assembly Speaker Jack Snelling and Deputy Opposition Leader Ms Vickie Chapman. It was a multicultural show to create awareness about Tamil issues among other communities too. It was a great success for many reasons and it helped to boost our membership substantially
6. ATC-SA Chapter has been working with several other groups who are also working with refugees in Christmas Island. Our work includes trying to help with collection of used mobile phones for distribution to refugees and Tamil books and video
7. ATC-SA Chapter has been assisting new Tamil migrants from Sri Lanka, sponsored by SA Government. We provide assistance with finding accommodation, employment and networking with the Tamil community in SA
8. ATC-SA Chapter's close work with SA MPs and Senators has contributed towards some very important motions on Tamil issues in Sri Lanka being passed in Federal Parliament.
9. ATC-SA Chapter has participated in several activities organised by Socialist Alliance, SA and the CMFEU, SA
10. ATC-SA Chapter representatives have travelled several times to Canberra for meetings
11. ATC-SA Chapter representatives were interviewed on the Tamil issue on the Adelaide Radio via Bremen Peace Prize winner Sue Gibley
12. ATC-SA Chapter regularly liaises with UNHCR with regards to work done in refugee camps

2009 Year End Summary Report from ATC Western Australia State Chapter

1. ATC-WA Chapter was officially launched on 31 May
2. ATC-WA Chapter representatives helped organise a public seminar in association with the Centre for Human Rights Education, on 29 September at Curtin University titled "Sri Lanka's Human Rights Catastrophe"
3. On 30 October, ATC-WA Chapter participated in the Reclaim the Night Rally demanding an end to violence against women
4. ATC-WA Chapter representatives were invited as special guest speakers to address the "EMILY's List WA Pat Giles Lunch" on 6 December
5. ATC-WA Chapter participated in a meeting with Coalition for Asylum seekers, Refugees and Detainees on 8 December
6. ATC-WA representatives have been interviewed several times by the WA media
7. ATC-WA participated and addresses several rallies and forums organised by other activist organisations
8. ATC-WA issues a regular news digest to their members
9. ATC-WA Chapter corresponds with Socialist Alliance, WA
10. ATC-WA Chapter closely liaises with MPs and Senators from WA

2009 Year End Summary Report from ATC News South Wales State Chapter

1. ATC-NSW Chapter was officially launched on 15 August
2. ATC-NSW Chapter corresponds with Socialist Alliance, NSW
3. ATC-NSW Chapter has appointed electoral coordinators. They, along with ATC representatives have met several MPs and Senators. We have had very positive responses and follow up appointments have been made.
4. ATC-NSW Chapter members are working closely with experts in the legal and judicial system to help with establishing information on Crimes Against Humanity committed by the Sri Lankan State
5. ATC-NSW Chapter is spear heading the Grants Team. This working group has successfully obtained two grants applied under ATC. It is very encouraging for a young organisation such as ATC to be able to receive these grants and it further confirms that ATC has earned credibility and trust within the wider Australian community and Australian government
6. ATC-NSW Chapter members attended the Refugee Ball, assisting the National Political Affairs Team with their lobbying
7. ATC-NSW Chapter volunteers working with STARTTS sent a box of gifts (story books, magazines, prayer books, Tamil movies, games, etc) donated by members of ATC to the Tamil refugees in the Christmas Island
8. ATC-NSW Chapter members working with the Refugee Support Group provided counselling and assistance to the Tamil refugees in the Villawood Detention Centre. We have made several visits to Villawood Detention Centre and provided gifts, including English-Tamil dictionaries. We since have received a few calls and our volunteers are in regular touch providing support and assistance when requested
9. ATC-NSW Chapter volunteers are part of the Voluntary Resource Board of the Migrant resource Centre and have been able to establish links to community services

2009 Year End Summary Report from ATC Victoria State Chapter

1. ATC-Vic Chapter was officially launched on 15 August
2. ATC-Vic Chapter representatives have met with Australian MPs and Senators
3. ATC-Vic Chapter representatives have attended several meetings and rallies & organised forums
4. ATC-Vic Chapter representative regularly inform and update our union bodies including the national body – Australian Council for Trade Unions
5. On 24 October, ATC-Vic Chapter representatives attended a forum organised by Latin American and South East Asia Solidarity Group'. An ATC-Vic representative addressed the audience on the subject "Human Rights and Civil Liberties in Sri Lanka".
6. On 10 November, members of ATC helped organise a Human Rights forum at Monash University
7. On 21 November, ATC-Vic Chapter representatives attended a fundraising gathering organised by BRAG
8. ATC-Vic Chapter representatives attended a public meeting organised by Socialist Alliance on 1 December
9. ATC-Vic Chapter representatives attended a public meeting organised by Socialist Alternative on 2 December

10. ATC-Vic Chapter representatives attended a rally organised by BRAG (Black Rights & Action Group & Alliance for Indigenous Self –determination) on 10 December
11. On 10 December, the International Human Rights Day, ATC-Vic Chapter in collaboration with the Humanitarian Crisis Hub organised a forum: “HUMAN RIGHTS: Whose business?” on 10 December
12. ATC-Vic Chapter is spearheading the humanitarian projects of ATC

2009 Year End Summary Report from ATC Community Projects Team

After close liaising by the National Political Affairs, Public Relations and Community Projects Teams, ATC was invited by the Department of Immigration to visit Tamil detainees at the Immigration Detention Centre in Christmas Island.

2009 Year End Summary Report from ATC National Public Relations Team

1. ATC has written a large number of briefing documents and letters to MPs, Senators and policy makers
2. Lobbying by the political team and public relations team has contributed significantly to several motions being passed in Federal Parliament by MPs and Senators:
 - Statement to the House by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, The Hon Stephen Smith MP, 14/9/09
 - Response to Question upon Notice asked by Senator Bob Brown to Senator Faulkner regarding Aid Funding to Sri Lanka, 16/10/09
 - Response to Question Without Notice, by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, The Hon Stephen Smith MP, 16/11/09
 - Response to Question Without Notice asked by Senator Sarah Hansen-Young to Senator The Hon Chris Evans, Minister for Immigration, 18/11/09
 - Response to Question Without Notice asked by Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP, to Hon Kevin Rudd MP, Prime Minister, 25/11/09
 - Motion Moved by Nick Champion, Chair of the ALP National Security Caucus Committee regarding Sri Lanka, 26/11/09
3. ATC's timely media releases and regular liaising with the media has ensured that the Tamil issues have been covered substantially in the Australian mainstream media.

Print Media:

- Rudd should talk tough to Sri Lanka – 17/10/09, The Daily Telegraph
- Tamils herded into disease-ridden camps seek any escape – 24/10/09, The Australian
- Tamils face death if sent home - Asylum Crisis – 24/10/09, The Australian
- Unions attack PM on asylum - ACTU to call for Tamils to be brought to Christmas Island – 2/11/09, The Australian
- Health concerns for Tamil asylum-seekers – 2/11/09, The Australian
- Tamils say take the deal – 13/11/09, Herald-Sun
- Test of stamina – 16/11/09, The Australian
- Detainee brawl began over game of pool – 24/11/09, SMH

Broadcast Media:

- Sri Lanka jails Tamil journalist for 20 years – 1/9/09, ABC

- Tamils Regrouping? – 6/10/09, SBS 6.30pm TV World News
- Webster talks with ATC – 13/10/09, 2UE Sydney
- Sri Lankans Plead For Asylum – 15/10/09, SBS 6.30pm TV World News
- There has been a desperate plea for the Sri Lankans detained – 15/10/09, SBS Sydney World News Australia
- The Australian Tamil Congress wants the Fed Govt to put more pressure – 15/10/09, Triple J Sydney
- An Australian Tamil group has called on the Federal Government to put more... – 15/10/09, Triple J Melbourne
- A nine year old Tamil Sri Lankan girl, currently one of 255 people – 15/10/09, ABC 702 Sydney
- The 255 Sri Lankans moored in West Java say they will not leave – 15/10/09, ABC 774 Melbourne
- ATC, a human rights group, said.. – 15/10/09, ABC 702 Sydney
- More than 250 Sri Lankans aboard a boat are refusing to come ashore – 15/10/09, Triple J Melbourne
- The Australian Tamil group says the Fed Govt should pressure Sri Lanka to – 15/10/09, ABC Newcastle
- More than 260 Sri Lankans on board a boat in West Java are... – 15/10/09, ABC 702 Sydney
- Interview with ATC – 16/10/09, 4GCR ABC Gold and Tweed Coasts
- Price replays a touching plea from young Brenda, a Sri Lankan Asylum Seeker – 16/10/09, 2UE Sydney
- Refugee Advocates say Kevin Rudd, PM should work with the Sri Lankan Govt.. – 17/10/09, 2CC Canberra
- It is claimed an asylum seeker vessel was deliberately sabotaged – 22/10/09, 2SM Sydney
- Question asked by ATC – 22/10/09, ABC Q and A
- Tamils slowly leaving refugee camps Waiting to go home – 20/10/09, ABC
- UN notes Sri Lankan progress on camps – 20/10/09, ABC
- Tamil Refugees Resettled – 23/10/09, SBS 6.30pm TV World News
- 'Absolute fear' pushing Tamils to Australia – 23/10/09, ABC
- ATC comments on the Tamil struggle – 26/10/09, ABC Darwin Adelaide
- The Australian Tamil community is seeking compassion from PM Rudd – 30/10/09, 2SM Sydney
- Tony Abbott, Federal Opposition frontbencher, is linking the sinking – 3/11/09, ABC 666 Canberra
- Tony Abbott, Federal Opposition frontbencher, is linking the sinking of a boat of... –3/11/09, Radio National Canberra
- Three confirmed dead in boat tragedy – 3/11/09, ABC
- US calls for detained Tamils to be released – 9/11/09, ABC
- The Australian Tamil Congress is offering to help the Fed Govt convince – 12/11/09, ABC 666 Canberra
- Peak Tamil offers Oceanic help – 12/11/09, ABC
- Tamils reject deal to disembark – 12/11/09, ABC

- Tamil group urges asylum seekers to accept govt deal – 12/11/09, AAP
 - The Australian Tamil Congress is offering to help the Fed Govt convince the... – 12/11/09, Radio National Canberra
 - The Australian Tamil community says the 78 asylum seekers should be settled in Australia – 13/11/09, 2NC ABC Newcastle
 - Australian Tamil groups say they are receiving news of a nearing solution – 13/11/09, 2SM Sydney
 - John Holmes, Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, United Nations, has visited refugee camps – 20/11/09, 2RN Radio National
4. ATC launched the *300,000 Reasons* campaign in early August as a call to action for both the Australian public and Australian Government, to advocate for the 300 000 Tamils that were being and/or had been imprisoned in military camps in Sri Lanka. It was in the form of a viral marketing campaign comprising of a website and online petition (300000.com.au), email distribution database, a Facebook cause page, Facebook bulletins delivered to members, postcard distribution. As of mid December, nearly 2500 emails had been sent to PM Kevin Rudd and each signatory's local MP, about 1500 signed campaign postcards were handed in back to ATC so that they could be presented to PM Rudd through various MPs, over 1500 people had joined the Facebook group. Various MPs, human rights activists and professionals commented on the very effective design of the campaign. We believe that this campaign contributed to the Australian government's decision to raise the issue of Sri Lanka's human rights at the CHOGM in Trinidad and Tobago.

These achievements are a testament to the hard work of our volunteers and the support of our members. We have a long way to go before reaching our ultimate goals but rest assured ATC will be picking up speed in 2010.

With more people behind us we can reach our goals much sooner. So, we ask you to help in encouraging more people to join ATC and make it a stronger organisation.