

Australian Tamil Congress

A Unified Voice for All Tamils



13 September 2010

Given your interest in the Tamil issue, we wish to update you on developments within the island of Sri Lanka and abroad.

Over the past month, we witnessed our Parliament re-organise itself, with many of us having taken the word 'democracy' for granted - our Federal Election was not wrought by corruption, our Independent MPs did not succumb to death threats during the negotiations and our elected representatives did not protest or burn effigies of eminent figures with whom they disagreed with.

However, such actions continue to take place on a regular basis in Sri Lanka, a country that Australia has close trade links with, and a country whose undemocratic actions and oppression of its Tamil citizens has resulted in an increase in asylum seekers reaching Australia.

Last week, the Sri Lankan Parliament voted in favour of a constitutional change, the [18th Amendment](#), which scrapped the two-term presidential limit and allowed the President to appoint judges, police and election commissioners, and central bank officials. This [dangerous change](#) strengthens President Rajapakse's increasingly tight grip on power and further increases the politicalisation of the island's police and the judiciary.

The Asian Human Rights Commission has described this development as a change from a "[phantom democracy into a complete dictatorship](#)". Former senior official with the United Nations in Sri Lanka, Gordon Weiss has stated that [democracy in Sri Lanka has been dying for some time](#). The United States of America has openly condemned the amendment voicing its concern "[that this constitutional amendment weakens checks and balances and thus undermines the principles of constitutional democracy](#)".

It is vital that Australia too adds its voice to the global condemnation of Sri Lanka's decline in democracy.

With Sri Lanka still continuing to [block an independent investigation into alleged war crimes](#), an international effort to pressure Sri Lanka into improving its [human rights record](#) and return to democracy may also see the number of asylum seekers from that island decreasing.

The Australian Tamil Congress calls for the Australian policy makers to pressure Sri Lanka to take genuine steps in ensuring long term peace is restored for all citizens on the island.