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What a Hero means to me....Maaveerar

Written by Saruja N

Our history in their eyes
Our future in their path
Tempted us, the blinded by torture
With the distant light of freedom
But left us on the journey
Left the fruit of youth, the warmth of family and the fear of death
Breath after breath
Inhaled the duties and exhaled the passion
Fought in the hope to see justice's reaction
No help no need
Determined in will power to succeed
Believed in the self, the unity and the people of the country
Made their own tracks, fought their own battles, made their own history
For each and every one of them it's personal
Magnitude of patriotism with the direction towards success
Born to see the war and living to see the end
Left as a hero with tracks for us to follow
Label them: terrorists, liars, whatever the media demands
But the world can't mask their identity as a freedom fighter, a survivor, a warrior, a Thamilan
The minority with the power to hold back the majority
The skills and achievements to turn the heads of the world
Brave to take a bullet
Strong to fight injustice
Humane to care for the innocents
In the land, the sea and the sky they fought
In the fight for freedom there are no boundaries
Yes, the genocidal war is long but the point is we haven't lost
They fought and continue to fight, inspire and motivate, They sparked the flames that burn to feed on freedom
For which we will continue to fight and continue the plight they have begun
We hold our hearts stained in pain
Raise our heads with pride we gained, And one day we will repay them
Fulfill the goals of both theirs and ours
Prove to the world that what they see as dreams is our reality
So, who are they?
A daughter a son
A father a mother
A brother a sister
A friend a neighbor
A patriot
A Maveerar

We Remember...by Roy Ratnavel

It's November 10, and I'm on a flight home after a two-week trip through Western Canada. As we lift off into the sky, a peach sun sets auspiciously over majestic snow capped row of mountains —the email status indicator light on my blackberry kept blinking in red, stubbornly.

Despite the flight attendant's instructions over the PA system, my curiosity got the better of me; so I read the email. It was from my son's school; which read "Preparations have been made for yearly Remembrance Day." Of course, everyone — including little school children in Canada are preparing to pay respect and commemorate the fallen in a meaningful way.

I am a Tamil. I have lived in Canada for more than two decades. Being a committed Canadian, I have always worn my poppy in the honour of those perished to save and protect democracy and justice. As a dedication, I have always quietly observed 11th hour of November 11th for almost two decades for the fallen, and to those innocent lives lost. This includes men, women and children.

Collectively, the sentiment of being Tamil, have left us in adopted land with our own nightmares and scarred memories, which lingered on and on, year after year. We have been devastated.

Our devastation has been replaced by wonder at life's mystery, and a profound surprise in the human spirit and its resilience. We now know that we are able to fall to the depths of sorrow yet rise again with time. We feel that we have joined a group that we never intended to join as immigrants from Sri Lanka, but now as 'hyphenated citizens' by allowing ourselves to live this journey in our own way — to experience the lows, the tears and the heartbreak — eventually brought us back to a new beginning.

Some Tamils are reluctant to speak about those Tamils who perished in Sri Lanka. Even me, I have been reluctant to speak about my father as a victim of war during Canadian Remembrance Day ceremony. Such baggage has not been always easy for a first generation Tamil immigrant in a Canadian setting.

Our accent, our heritage, our long names, our brown skin point to our distinct identity. Stereotypes about Tamils, Tiger terrorists, and terror sympathizers were the immediate connection with whom we are. Now on this side of knowing, everything has been recon-

figured: identities, histories, private narratives and, most certainly, the future.

But we have trusted our heart on this path, and now we will embrace joy and happiness when it comes. We deserve this; it has been a hard road with painful memories. Hope the times will change and those stereotypes will be appropriately addressed. Beyond that, we have to find the courage to stand in front of the ocean of mainstream and speak about our war experience in Sri Lanka.

The pieces of our heart that were so broken and dismembered seem to be finding a way back together. We see true appreciation for each day returning. As new Canadians we recognize the raw beauty of Remembrance Day, our family, laughter and friends without the immediate sense of loss following.

As we struggle, we know Sri Lanka's evil cannot be undone. But by dismissing its twisted logic for the poisonous nonsense it is, we can act to ensure it does not metastasize into the marketplace of ideas. There is no time to process the war. There is no time to mourn the loss our relatives. Somehow, in spite of all this our frozen nightmares, anger and forgotten dreams of our own nation, we managed to get along with our lives. Our emotional wounds do not heal, but they fester.

We can't remain quiet observer on this Remembrance Day agitated with our own individual thoughts and nightmares. This year while addressing the nation after the massacre, the Prime Minister of Norway noted, "Evil can kill a person, but never conquer a people." Those words are so true in Tamils' world. When we think of the lost loved ones in our search for our homeland we commemorate them because we don't want to be conquered by Sri Lankan evil. No evil can withstand the strength of people whose time has come.

We want to make it possible to hear voices of those who perished under Sri Lankan tyranny. We want to listen to them, remember them, imagine their struggles and pain, and carry their last wishes to freedom and peace for Tamils in Sri Lanka.

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We Remember cont...

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Every day, life gives you an opportunity to learn some real lessons. And so, tonight as I fly into Vancouver to meet my family again, I wonder at the serendipity that led me to this article. When I get home, I look forward to giving my family a warm embrace while thanking all those brave soldiers who fought for freedom and a second chance at life.

It has been said that the cells of our body change every seven years. Tamils have then had three complete cellular changes in over two decades since we arrived in our respective adopted land. As newcomers to this great land we have trusted our heart on this path, and now we are blessed joy and happiness with our families. It has been a hard-won battle — but the residual scar on our psyche still lingers.

On this Remembrance Day, our search for justice, inner peace and closure, born out of tragedy, has

risen once again. The bitter narrative of oppression and grievance is over for our dead loved ones. To them, with the young and the living, the narrative of possibility — through next generation — can begin again.

We're here. We're together. Our families are the best gift they could have left us. We remember.

They can rest now.

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Victorian Chapter Activities

Providing Assistance to the New Tamil Arrivals

ATC members were involved in meeting the new arrivals in Dandenong. ATC distributed bicycles, many lap tops, computers, toys and books. Also we have briefed them about the help available in the ATC. Some have been facilitated toward proper health services. Transport also was arranged for some kids to go to Tamil schools. More than anything we have given them the necessary leads to obtain services from and through ATC.

Political and PR work in Victoria

ATC Political Team has met few key parliamentarians and academics to lobby the need for Australia to support for an International Independent Investigations and updating on the current situation in North and East of Sri Lanka using the submission by Mr M A Sumanthiran MP.

The Critical Situation facing the Tamil People in Sri Lanka

Dr Brian Senewiratne



The humanitarian situation in the Tamil-speaking area in the North and East, more than two years after the so called 'end' of the war, between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Tamil people, is the most serious the Tamils have faced in their 2,500 years of re-

corded history. In the six decades that I have campaigned for the rights of the Tamils to live with equality, dignity, safety, and now to live at all, I cannot think of any period in which they have been in such a terrible situation.

The Tamil areas are under the heel of one of the most ruthless and irresponsible Armed Forces anywhere in the world, and one the most brutal, racist, and oppressive regime ever to run Sri Lanka. It is a regime which has no accountability, in Sri Lanka or abroad, and can do whatever it wants, to whoever it wants, anywhere in the country, not just in the Tamil areas.

Dr Winston Panchacharam (Nanuet, New York) in his incomparable book *Genocide in Sri Lanka* which has just been published sets out some of this. In his opening letter of appeal to "Global Leaders for the Protection of the Vulnerable and those Oppressed by Genocidal Acts" refers to the "Dying Race of Tamils in Sri Lanka".

This is not alarmist language. Every recent publication (cited below) strongly indicates that the Tamils are indeed a dying race facing serious violations of human rights which, unless checked, will result in their demise. An internationally credible group appointed by the UN Secretary General (which I will refer to), uses the term "extermination" (of the Tamils) and goes on to justify the use of this term which, as far as I am aware, has never been used before.

'Extermination' or 'Genocide' is an emergency and calls

for urgent action which is not forthcoming. What is alarming is that a regime guilty of some of the most serious war-crimes and crimes against humanity, is getting away with it.

The mass slaughter of some 40,000 (perhaps many more) unarmed Tamil civilians, with another 160,000 unaccounted for, was carried out in just five months (January-May 2009), in a mass murder with no witnesses. This has no parallel in recent times. This is now being followed by a 'slow extermination' of the Tamils by the denial of food and medical care, loss of their property, the blocking of their survival activities (agriculture and fishing), and the denial of unrestricted access to international humanitarian organisations and groups.

The Tamil areas are a vast 'slow killing field', not as dramatic as the mass murder documented in the UK Channel 4 News video, "Sri Lanka's Killing Fields", but a slow 'extermination camp' which covers the entire North and East. This has been kept out of sight by the denial of free and unrestricted access to international observers by the imposition of a strict censorship. The 'Sri Lankan' Armed Forces (99% Sinhalese) who run the area, do what they want with the 'victims of war' - Tamil people, citizens of the country.

It astounds me, a Sinhalese, that at this most critical period faced by the Tamil people in the North and East, the only people who can save them, the million-strong expatriate Sri Lankan Tamils, living and working in some of the most powerful nations on earth, have 'gone quiet', and have 'given up'. To say that they have abandoned their fellow Tamils in the North and East is a gross understatement. I find this deeply disturbing and totally unacceptable.

[Full Article](#)

New South Wales Chapter Activities

NSW Young Labor Unanimously Passes motion at the State Conference in NSW

ATC representatives have lobbied and attended meetings with the Young Labor representatives. The following **motion was passed at Young Labor's State Conference** unanimously.

Inner West YLA
Preamble:

Following the conclusion of the 25-year civil war in Sri Lanka, a number of serious allegations of war crimes against Tamil civilians have emerged. This includes a recently released report by a United Nations Special Expert Panel which concluded that the actions of "both the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) could amount to **war crimes and crimes against humanity.**"

These alleged crimes include executions, rape and torture by government forces. The report also lists the shelling of civilians inside "no-fire zones", the "systematic shelling" of hospitals and attacks on the UN and Red Cross by the Sri Lankan Government. The UN panel claims Sri Lankan government authorities "sought to intimidate and silence the media and other critics of the war through a variety of threats and actions, including the use of white vans to abduct and to make people disap-

pear". Meanwhile, the LTTE stands accused of refusing Tamil civilians permission to leave the conflict zone and "using them as hostages" in a "buffer zone".

A number of countries – including the United Kingdom and Canada – have called for an independent international investigation into allegations of war crimes committed in the final months of the civil war.

Platform:

NSW Young Labor calls on the Federal Government to join international efforts and support an independent international investigation into allegations of war crimes against Tamil civilians.

Action:

NSW Young Labor Community Speak will hold a forum in conjunction with the Australian Tamil Congress and the Australian Tamil Electoral Lobby and engage with young members of these groups. NSW Young Labor will advise these groups of our support for an independent investigation.

ATC representatives invited to Sub Continent Friends of Labor's Media Conference

On Friday, 4 Nov 2011, Sub Continent Friends of Labor organised its second annual dinner with Sub Continent Media at Himalaya Restaurant Granville Sydney. This function once again was a great success with over 85 people participating. Amongst the Parliamentary guests were:

Hon Kate Lundy- Parliamentary Secretary to Prime Minister and Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Multi Cultural Affairs , Hon John Robertson Leader of Opposition, Former Premier Hon Nathan Rees, Hon Michael Daley Shadow Minister for Finance , Hon Barbara Perry Shadow Minister for Ageing and Disability Services,, Hon Amanda Fazio _Opposition Whip, Hon Andrew McDonald Shadow Minister for Health and Medical research, Robert Furlo - Shadow Minister Roads and Ports, Shaoquett

Moselmane, Ms n.Michelle Rowland and Deborah O'Neil.



Hon Nathan Rees speaking at the Sub Continent Friends of Labor

New South Wales Reportcont

Chairperson of the Sub Continent Friends of Labor Mr Harish Velji in his speech called for international independent investigations into war crimes Sri Lanka. He further stated that Sub Continent Friends of Labor strongly believes that there is a need for the issues raised to be investigated by the International War Crimes Tribunal.

Ms Michelle Rowland MP-Member for Greenway and Hon Nathan Rees-Member for Toongabbie (State Government) both acknowledged the media attention on War Crimes in Sri Lanka during CHOGM and supported the call for an international independent investigations.



Federal and State Members of Parliament at the event



Queensland Chapter Activities

Paul Keating - in conversation with Richard Fidler- 2 November 2011

ATC representatives attended the event and had the opportunity to meet Mr Keating. Presented by the Brisbane Writers festival, Paul Keating spoke about his new book “AfterWords – the post Prime Ministerial Speeches”.

ALP, Brisbane Northside (Lilley, Longman, Petrie, Brisbane & Dickson)- 6 November 2011

The conference was attended by Deputy Prime Minister The Hon Wayne Swan MP, Senator Mark Furner and several other Federal and State MPs. ATC ALP members attended the meeting.

Senator Mark gave ATC a letter support letter for the

AUS Aid funding for 2011/12 on ‘Jaffna Peninsula Groundwater Study’ project.

Trip to Scherger Immigration Detention Centre- 11th November 2011 to 13th November 2011

ATC representatives visited Scherger Immigration Detention Centre. With the help of the boys in Weipa detention centre a room for Hindu prayer has been set up and a priest visited the centre.

ATC representatives as part of CISSR team (Strategic Framework and Stakeholder Engagement Branch of the Immigration. Dept) along with members of the Minister’s advisory group visited detention centre. Detainees were briefed by the group about the new proposed policy initiative – issuing ‘Bridging Visa’ and community detention.

Queensland Chapter Activities cont....

Eidos event - Hon. Michael Kirby QC

ATC representative attended the Eidos event and had the opportunity to meet Hon Kirby. Hon Kirby reflected on the successes and failures of the recent CHOGM meeting in an address entitled '*Reforming the Commonwealth of Nations? Last chance for global association*'.

The Q&A session was hosted by ABC Radio National 'Australia Talks' host Paul Barclay. Paul's first question to Hon Kirby was on Sri Lanka and War Crimes

Breakfast with Hon. Kevin Rudd, Riverbend Books, Bulimba – 26th November 2011

Hon Kevin attended the book launch of Mr Troy Bramston. Troy Bramston is the author of Looking for the *Light on the Hill*, a book that has already started debates across the nation.

At the invitation of Senator Moore, ATC representative who attended the book launch had a chance to discuss briefly the LLRC report. Updated about the leaked LLRC report and Minister reiterated that LLRC should conform to the international standards and he will comment on the report once officially released.

Get-together with new arrivals

On October 23 ATC members organised a get-together with number of new arrivals and their families at a local park. Over 60 people participated. Day's activities included competitions for children and adults, prizes, lunch and discussions on issues affecting the new arrivals and need assessments, etc. Overall the day was not only full of fun and laughter but was a wholesome experience to all those attended. Similar activities are planned for the future

Tamils Call For War Crimes Tribunal

By Bami Jegan

As Tamils gathered to remember those who died in the independence struggle yesterday, the call for an independent investigation into war crimes in Sri Lanka is getting louder, writes Bami Jegan

Yesterday I joined hundreds of thousands of Tamils across the world — in the UK, France, Germany Switzerland, America and India — to remember those who died in the 26-year struggle for our independence. It was day of haunting sadness.

The day is called "Maaveerar Naal". Veerar in Tamil means "warrior or hero". Maa means "great". Naal means "day".

It is held each year on 27 November, the date the first Tamil Tiger, Shankar, died in combat in 1982. I was two years old.

Alongside 2000 Tamils at a park in Silverwater in Sydney's west, I wept for the 40,000 Tamils that were massacred by the Sri Lankan Government in 2009. I paid my respects to those who sacrificed their lives for my freedom.

I remembered the months of paralysing fear my family

went through while my father was in the former conflict zone. I went to bed each night petrified of waking up to news he had been killed in an aerial attack by Sri Lankan Kfir jets or drones.

I honoured my dearest friend K, and the hours of laughter we shared together. A night I will never forget is when we sat under monsoon stars in 2006, talking about life and love, war and peace till 4am in the morning. He kept the electricity generator running for me, even though it would have cost him more than he could afford because he knew I was scared of the dark. He died fighting for my identity.

The Sri Lankan Government is on a witchhunt to silence anyone that dares speak out about the atrocities committed against the Tamils. I have the honour of being on their list. This has only strengthened my resolve.

When people ask me where I am from, I say "I am Tamil". I am not a Sri Lankan. A regime that has brutalised, terrorised and murdered, does not speak in my name.

The Mahavamsa, the great chronicle of Sri Lanka, is interpreted by the country's rulers as "proving" that Sri Lanka is a Sinhalese Buddhist island. It can equally be read as the story of how the Sinhalese and Tamils founded

Tamils Call For War Crimes Tribunal...cont

the country together. In the story, the Tamil King Elara ruled with equal justice and was accepted by both communities.

As a diaspora Tamil I have struggled to understand my privileged place in the west. There is nothing I want that I can't have. But since I first returned to Sri Lanka in 2002, I have had no peace of mind.

At the age of 22 I came face to face with the horrors of war: orphaned children; adults and children who had lost their arms, legs and eyesight; Tamil women who had been raped by the Sri Lankan army; men who had been tortured. The memories are endless and terrifying.

How do I reconcile my fortunate life with these stories? How do I explain to my western friends the pain and suffering I have witnessed? How do I not let their pain become a part of me?

I feel incredibly lost in post-war Sri Lanka as do many other diaspora Tamils. What is our role now?

Two and a half years ago genocide was committed against the Tamils of Sri Lanka and the entire international community did nothing to stop it.

The horrifying images of war crimes and crimes against humanity shown in Channel Four's ['Sri Lanka's Killing Fields'](#) were a stark wake up call to the world. The broader understanding and perception of the Tamil

struggle is shifting.

UK's Prime Minister David Cameron, Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper, our former Prime Minister [Malcolm Fraser](#) have come out strongly in favour of an independent war crimes tribunal for Sri Lanka. As has the UN Secretary General's [Panel of Experts](#), Amnesty International, [International Crisis Group](#), and Human Rights Watch.

Shamefully our Prime Minister and Foreign Minister won't add their voice to this call for an independent investigation.

I don't know if there will ever be an independent war crimes tribunal for Sri Lanka. But the Arab Spring has shown the world that anything is possible. Hope must continue in some form.

The war no longer defines me. But the struggle forever will. I am a Tamil and with that comes a responsibility. A responsibility to myself, to my father, to K and to the Maveerars to honour the sacrifices and strength of my ancestors: "Because you died, we continue to live".

Disclaimer : *The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of ATC*



Message from the Newsletter Team

We would like to thank all our members and supporters for taking time to provide us feedback and support. October newsletter highlighted the achievement of the conference and we received several emails of appreciation. We thank you all for your continued support.

We received several articles for the November newsletter and we apologise if your request was not published. We will keep them and publish in the coming issues.

ATC Newsletter Team

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In the past, only a fraction of Tamils have participated in politically active groups. Today the need is for a united and concerted action. We need to draw the silent majority and fresh blood into political awareness to convey the collective view of our community effectively.

We have some major projects and we cannot succeed without membership numbers and the funds that can generate! We are aware that a strong membership base is paramount to have a viable platform to make an impact. We earnestly request your help at this critical time to join our efforts. Being member of ATC, you will be entitled to participate in various ATC working groups and influence the direction.

You can contribute in various ways to our long-, medium- and short-term activities in humanitarian, legal, political, community, and communication fronts.

Please join us in our crusade for peace and justice by having your family and friends join ATC!

Articles and feedback to the National Newsletter

Please send us your views and creations to be included in our Newsletters to

newsletter@australiantamilcongress.com

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Australian Tamil Congress: On a Crusade for Peace and Justice

Vision

“Australian Tamil Congress is formed in order to create a congress of our people, for our people and by our people based on the principles of justice and peace amongst ourselves, and to provide for a common voice in promoting our general welfare, prosperity, independence, equality, security and peace”

Mission

“The Australian Tamil Congress encourages the positive participation of Tamils in Australian society, highlights issues of importance to Tamils, upholds core Australian values and engages other communities, governments and organisations in addressing the socio-cultural and political concerns of Tamils.”

Objective

“As part of an international Tamil human rights and political organization dedicated to generating change through ‘Collective Global Tamil’ action to institute and educate people on Tamils’ right to survival and self-determination, and to promote the safety, welfare, economic development of Tamils worldwide; and to teach the lessons of the Tamil Genocide in Sri Lanka for future generations.”

