



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

### Fifty-fourth session

11 September–13 October 2023

Agenda item 4

### Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

## **Written statement\* submitted by ABC Tamil Oli, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 August 2023]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



## **Thileepan's Fast unto Death and Tamils' Right to Self-Determination**

September 2023 marks 36 years since Lt Col. Thileepan began his hunger strike at Nallur Kandaswamy Temple in protest against the failure of the Indian government to honour the pledges made to the Tamil people. Thileepan began his fast on 15th September 1987, surrounded by over 100,000 supporters, and died 11 days later, on the 26th September 1987.

On the 13th September 1987, Thileepan put forward five demands to the Indian government:

- 1) All Tamils detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act should be released.
- 2) "The colonisation by Sinhalese in Tamil areas under the guise of rehabilitation should be stopped."
- 3) All such rehabilitation should be stopped until an interim government is formed.
- 4) The Sri Lankan government should stop opening new Police stations and camps in the North-eastern province.
- 5) The Sri Lankan army and Police should withdraw from schools in Tamil villages and the weapons given by the Sri Lankan government to 'homeguards' should be withdrawn under the supervision of the Indian army.

### **An excerpt from Adele Balasingham's eye witness account of Thileepan's protest:**

"Thileepan's non-violent struggle was unique and extraordinary for its commitment. Although an armed guerilla fighter, he chose the spiritual mode of 'ahimsa' as enunciated by the great Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi to impress upon India the plight and predicament of the people of Tamil Eelam.

The levels to which the Tamil people or more specifically, the LTTE cadres, are prepared to go for their freedom mirrors not only a deep passion for their liberation, but indicates the phenomenal degree of oppression they have been subjected to. It is only those who experience intolerable oppression of such a magnitude, of being threatened with extinction, that are capable of supreme forms of self sacrifice as we have seen from Thileepan's episode.

Thileepan, the young Tiger leader of Jaffna, took the podium on the 14th September at the Nallur Kandasamy temple to commence his fast- unto-death as a protest against India's failure to fulfill her pledges, and to mobilise the frustrated sentiments of the Tamils into a national mass upsurgence.

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Thileepan, who had travelled to Delhi as part of LTTE leader Vellupillai Pirabakaran's delegation before the signing of the Accord, was informed of the content of the dialogue that had taken place between the Indian Prime Minister and the LTTE leader.

With the knowledge that there was an unwritten agreement between Indian Premier Rajiv Gandhi and Mr. Pirabakaran and that it had not been implemented, he felt that his people and the struggle had been betrayed and decided on a fast-unto-death demanding the fulfillment of the pledges.

When news of Thileepan's fast-unto-death and the deteriorating political situation between the LTTE and the Indian Peace Keeping Force reached us, we decided to leave India for Jaffna.

My joy at reaching the shores of Tamil Eelam after so many years was contained by the gloom that hung in the air. Thileepan was a few days into his fast till death and the population of the Peninsula was seriously concerned and wholeheartedly behind the non-violent campaign of a single individual seeking justice from the world's largest democracy. Subsequently, our first priority after our arrival in the Peninsula was to visit Thileepan encamped at the historic Nallur Kandasamy temple, the cultural and spiritual centre of the Jaffna Tamils.

Thileepan's decision to single-handedly take on the credibility of the Indian state was not incongruous with his history of resistance to state oppression as a cadre in the LTTE. He had faced battle on several occasions in defence of Jaffna during Kittu's time and suffered serious abdominal wounds in the process. He was well known for his astute understanding of the politics and mindset of his people and emerged as a radical political leader.

The senior LTTE women cadres often speak of his staunch advocacy of inducting women into the national struggle and is remembered as one of the founding fathers in the promotion of women's issues. With such a history it comes as no surprise that he endeared himself not only to the cadres but the people of Jaffna also.

As we entered the premises of the Nallur Kandasamy temple we were confronted by a sea of people seated on the white sands under the blazing sun. The air was thick with collective emotion and solemnity. This fading young man on the platform obviously embodied the political sentiments and aspirations of his people.

But it was more than that also. Thileepan's fast had touched the spirit of the Tamil people and mobilised the popular masses in unprecedented solidarity. One could sense how this extraordinary sacrifice of a fragile young man had suddenly assumed a formidable force as the collective strength of his people. Thileepan's fast was a supreme act of transcendence of individuality for a collective cause. Literally, it was an act of self-crucifixion, a noble act by which this brave young man condemned himself to death so that others could live in freedom and dignity.

With deep humility, Bala and I mounted the platform to speak to the reposed Thileepan. Already several days without food or water and with a dry cracked mouth, Thileepan could only whisper. Bala leaned closer to the weakened Thileepan and exchanged words with him. Naturally enough, Thileepan enquired about the political developments. We left soon afterwards, never to see him alive again.

As Thileepan's fast moved on in days, he was no longer able to address the public from the podium and spent much of his time lying quietly as his condition steadily deteriorated. As Thileepan grew visibly weaker in front of his people's eyes, their anger and resentment towards India and the IPKF grew stronger. The sight of this popular young man being allowed to die in such an agonising manner generated disbelief at the depth of callousness of the Indian government and the Indian Peace Keeping Force.

Thileepan's willingness to sacrifice his life in such a way touched the spirit of the people and his unnecessary tragic death on 26th September planted deeply the seeds of disenchantment with the Indian Peace Keeping Force."

### **Thileepan's sacrifice remembered in 48 countries**

36 years later, more than 6 million of Eelam Tamils are still waiting for exercise their Right to self-determination and Justice for Tamils genocide with international Criminal court with in United Nations human rights and United Nations' special committee on decolonization.

For last 36 years All Tamil from 48 countries organize numerous commemoration events were held across the North-East marking each anniversary since the death of Lt Col Thileepan, a political wing leader of the LTTE who fasted to death, in a protest appealing to the Indian government to honour pledges made to the Tamil people.

Stores all around the world are closed on 26th September to commemorate each anniversary of the Lt. Col. Thileepan's hunger strike. That day marks the last day of his fast and of commemoration events, marking his 11-day hunger strike until death, 36 years ago.

### **Recommendation**

- a. Take immediate measures to demilitarize North and East Sri Lanka
- b. Endorse the Tamil genocide resolution of 2015 passed by the Northern Provincial Council in February 2015.
- c. Refer Sri Lanka to The ICC,
- d. Perpetrators of war crimes, crimes of genocides and crimes against humanity must be investigated and brought to international justice process.
- e. Council Members to have a new Resolution under Agenda 4 to appoint a special Rapporteur to monitor and investigate ongoing human rights violations and repression against the Tamil people.
- f. To the 4th committee members of General Assembly: To recognize that Tamil Territories are not Governing by Tamils
- g. conducting an internationally monitored Referendum.
- h. We call on the European Commission to stop being complicit in the genocide against the Tamil people and to suspend all aid and benefits such as the Generalized System of Preferences Plus (GSP+) granted to Sri Lanka.
- i. OHCHR's successive reports don't mention "Tamils" who are the victims of genocide in Sri Lanka, we therefor request you to investigate this omission and to mention the appropriate word of "TAMILS" wherever it's needful.

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Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappearance Vavuniya district, Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappearance Mannar district, Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappearance Trincomalee district, Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappearance Kilinochchi district, Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappearance Mullaithivu district, Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappearance Jaffna, Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappearance Batticaloa district, Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappearance Amaparai district, Alliance internationale contre le génocide, ALLIANCE INTERNATIONALE CONTRE LE GENOCIDE DES TAMOULS, Alliance Internationale de Défense des Droits Humains, ALLIANCE INTERNATIONALE DES JOURNALISTES, Association Internationale Contre les Disparitions forcées, GLOBAL TAMIL MOUVEMENT, Gouvernement en Exil du Tamil Eelam, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.