

NOTE

People's Tribunal on Sri Lanka

A Correspondent writes :

The Irish Forum for Peace in Sri Lanka has done a splendid job by circulating a preview of the report completed by the permanent People's Tribunal following their investigation into alleged human rights abuses and war crimes in Sri Lanka. The report is simply bone-chilling :

“The Government of Sri Lanka pursued military actions in violation of international law, including the Geneva conventions and the Declaration of Human Rights. The resulting atrocities of rape, torture, assassinations, “disappearances”, and withholding of food, water and medical supplies brutalised and threatened the survival of the Tamil community.”

[Page-15, Report of the Permanent People's Tribunal on Sri Lanka]

The findings of the Tribunal fall into four broad categories:

1. The Sri Lankan Government and Security Forces and aligned paramilitary groups have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity;
2. That the international community, particularly the UK and USA, share responsibility for the breakdown of the peace process. The European Union has been com-plicit in the obstruction and dismantling of the peace process and stigmatizing Tamil groups in banning the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam;
3. Numerous countries have facilitated the Sri Lankan Government in perpetration of the above-mentioned crimes by bolstering its military capabilities;
4. The International Community has neglected its duty to promote peace in the region.

The Tribunal goes on to make the following recommendations to the Sri Lankan Government:

1. The establishment of an authoritative Truth and Justice commission;
2. The immediate repeal of Prevention of Terrorism Act, 1979;
3. Ensure the protection and welfare of the 12,000 political prisoners currently being held in Sri Lanka;
4. Disband all paramilitary forces and reduce military presence in Tamil areas;
5. Implement a political power sharing solution with the full participation of the Tamil people.

Further, the Tribunal makes two core recommendations to the International Community, including the Sri Lankan Government :

1. Appoint a UN special rapporteur for Sri Lanka to investigate and identify responsibilities for human rights violations, violations of humanitarian law and war crimes committed by all parties in conflict;
2. Support the establishment of an independent group of eminent persons to investigate the responsibilities of the international community in the disruption of the ceasefire agreement and subsequent war crimes and crimes against humanity and provision of the Sri Lankan Government with weapons during the ceasefire.

The hard reality is that abuses continue till date. It is hoped that international community and the media will continue to pay attention and fulfil their obligations to those who are suffering due to needless violence in Sri Lanka, particularly after the publication of the Tribunal Report.

The Tribunal concludes its report as follows :

"Therefore, the PPT declares that any harm that might happen to those that testified or to their families should be considered as the exclusive responsibility of those authorities and actors addressed within our judgement. We commit ourselves to maintain a sharp attention to the safety of the witnesses who have courageously contributed to the fact-finding task of the tribunal. If anything would happen to any of them, we will hold the government of Sri Lanka responsible for that."

But the government of Sri Lanka is not listening. What is more disturbing is the fact that political parties in India ignore the barbarity committed against the minority Tamil community in Sri Lanka. Human Rights fighting against police atrocities across India's length and breadth of India, cannot avoid their moral responsibility to highlight the persecuted Tamil minority of Sri Lanka. The idea of People's Tribunal first got popularised by Bertrand Russel during the Vietnam War. Today, there are so many Vietnams throughout the world. □□□