

Chairwoman Nita Lowey
United States House of Representatives
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and
Related Programs
Room HB-26 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Ranking Member Kay Granger
United States House of Representatives
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and
Related Programs
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

February 26, 2010

Dear Chairwoman Lowey and Ranking Member Granger:

The Tamil American Peace Initiative (TAPI) writes to thank you for your strong support for language included in the fiscal year 2010 State and Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill on Sri Lanka, and to encourage your continued support for similar or strengthened language to be included during the upcoming fiscal year 2011 appropriations process.

Since the civil war in Sri Lanka ended in May 2009, we believe that the Government of Sri Lanka has squandered countless opportunities to make real progress towards building a lasting peace and advancing reconciliation. We, like many watching Sri Lanka, understood that the January presidential election was a hurdle to be crossed before the much-needed change on the island could be advanced. We were hopeful that some elements of the reconciliation that were promised to the United States and the international community by the Government of Sri Lanka would come to pass once their mandate was endorsed.

But it is now clear to us that the re-elected Rajapaksa government is still fighting a war instead of building a peace. Since his re-election, a pattern of behavior has established facts on the ground that cannot be ignored. Our specific concerns include the following:

- Hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other Tamils lacking government-issued IDs were excluded from the voting for the presidential election and will similarly be excluded for the upcoming parliamentary elections.
- The Government of Sri Lanka has made no moves to address any of the voting problems in advance of the parliamentary voting, including the lack of ability to register, lack of access to polling places, and lack of government-issued identification, among other issues. If the parliamentary elections are held in this climate, the Tamils and Sri Lanka's minorities will be further, and more severely, disenfranchised precisely when the difficult work that will determine their futures is begun.
- The continued arrest and detainment of journalists and members civil society, as well as a crackdown on the use of the internet, has reinforced the government's lack of respect for free speech and dissent in the post-conflict period.
- The status of hundreds of ex-combatants is still uncertain, and no process has been formally established to either levy charges against them or see them tried, which establishes a poor precedent for justice in a volatile environment.
- The lack of access to the former conflict areas by international observers and the media continues to raise concerns about the status of IDPs and basic rights and freedoms.

- Rather than developing a framework to resolve the substantial land disputes in the former conflict areas, the Government of Sri Lanka has pursued commercial contracts leasing this land to foreign agricultural, industrial, and tourism conglomerates.
- The February 8th arrest and detainment of defeated presidential candidate Sarath Fonseka and his subsequent treatment and lack of access to due process indicate the beginning of a new wave of crackdowns against those the government perceives as their challengers.
- Despite a pending debt crisis that it is unprepared to address and clearly expects outside aid to offset, the Sri Lankan government continues to expand its non-civilian military capabilities, including a new \$300 million loan from Russia to purchase new weapons systems, even while it continues to borrow and rely on aid to address basic humanitarian needs. This raises concerns about the prioritization of peace, and exactly who the government believes it is still fighting against.

With these recent developments in mind, we would urge the Subcommittee to consider the inclusion of language that would restrict funding for Foreign Military Financing unless the Secretary of State can verify to the Committee that the Government of Sri Lanka has taken the necessary steps towards: investigating members of the civilian government and military for accusations of human rights violations and holding them accountable, as necessary; providing journalists and humanitarian organizations access to all former conflict areas; and working to return internally displaced individuals to their homes. Furthermore, we would also urge you to support language encouraging increased accountability and transparency of US and United Nations aid going to non-governmental organizations and other entities in Sri Lanka.

We hope that the inclusion of this language and restrictions on FMF funds will demonstrate to the Government of Sri Lanka that they will be held accountable for their promises of change and their duties of reconciliation and good governance. All the people of Sri Lanka have suffered much from the war, and they equally now deserve the opportunity for peace and prosperity. TAPI believes a measure of accountability can be achieved through the restriction of FMF funding until the government meets the basic benchmarks they laid out for themselves.

We appreciate your consideration of our recommendations and look forward to working with you in the coming months.

Sincerely,