

AUSTRALASIAN FEDERATION OF TAMIL ASSOCIATIONS INC.

Established 1984

PO Box 382, Mawson, ACT 2607, Australia

E-mail: chair.afta@gmail.com

URGENT

**The Hon Kevin Rudd MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600**

Dear Hon. Prime Minister

An Urgent Appeal to Heed to the Humanitarian Plea from the Fasting Tamil Australian Youth in Sydney and Melbourne

The Australasian Federation of Tamil Associations (AFTA), the peak body representing the Tamil Australians, would like to bring **to your urgent attention** about the Tamil Australian youth who are on a “**Starve until you act**” activity in Sydney and Melbourne. Three youths in Sydney started their fasting on Saturday, 11th April at Parramatta Church Street Mall and later moved with their supporters and sympathisers to Kirribilli House on Sunday night. Taking into consideration of the inconveniences to the residents of Kirribilli Avenue, they have now decided to move to the lawns outside the Lodge in Canberra. The four youths in Melbourne started their fast on Monday, 13th April.

The reasons why they have to resort to this drastic action have been well articulated in the letter that was written to you and copied to AFTA (a copy attached) by the Sydney youth. They have vowed to remain without food, water and medical aid until the horrific fate that awaits the Tamil people in Sri Lanka at the hands of the Government of Sri Lanka is acknowledged by the Australian government and given assurance of meaningful diplomatic action.

This spontaneous drastic action by our youth indicates that they are frustrated over the lack of positive action taken to date by the Rudd Labor Government to end the suffering of their brethren in the Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka. They appear to have lost confidence in their community leaders who had been making representations without much success to the Australian government authorities time and again pleading for

- condemnation of the genocidal attacks on the Tamil people,
- the need to bring about an immediate and permanent ceasefire to end the killings and gain unhindered access to independent observers and humanitarian agencies to ascertain where the besieged civilians wish to live with dignity; and
- Political negotiations between Sri Lanka and the LTTE addressing Tamils' right to self-determination.

Member Associations:

Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Darwin, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney, Auckland and Wellington

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As we write this letter, there is news coming out of Sri Lanka that President Mahinda Rajapaksa had told the armed forces to halt offensive operations during the Sri Lankan New Year -- celebrated today and tomorrow by both the ethnic Tamils and the Sinhalese. Tamils consider this action by the government as to give a respite for the Sri Lankan soldiers, a badly needed break to celebrate the New Year.

Although the move fell short of the cease-fire that foreign governments, the United Nations and human rights groups had called for, it at least halts indiscriminate bombing and shelling of civilians and offers a window of opportunity for independent observers and humanitarian agencies to access the 'no-fire zone' and assess the true situation and work towards a permanent ceasefire and peace negotiations.

U.N. Chief Ban Ki-moon on Sunday welcomed the Sri Lankan government's decision to halt its military offensive against the LTTE for two days, but said the move fell short of his demand for a "full humanitarian pause". "This is less than the full humanitarian pause of several days I had pressed for but is nevertheless a useful first step and an opportunity to move towards the peaceful and orderly end to the fighting now so badly needed," Mr. Ban said.

British Foreign Secretary David Miliband said in a statement on Sunday, "*The people of Sri Lanka have suffered for a long time in the absence of credible moves toward peaceful resolution of the dispute.*"

Richard Boucher, the US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia "*emphasized US concern about the plight of the civilians trapped in the 'no fire zone' in northern Sri Lanka and urged Foreign Secretary Kohona to protect civilians,*" the State Department said in a statement on the 10th April.

AFTA feels, despite the repeated calls by the international community for a ceasefire to protect the civilians from a catastrophe, the Sri Lankan government's recalcitrant stand and the lack of meaningful diplomatic action by our government may lead to more and more Tamil youth in Australia to follow the actions of these 3 youths in Sydney and 4 in Melbourne.

You will appreciate that the 4 demands spelt out in their letter to you by these youths have been repeatedly emphasised by AFTA in its communications with your government and the opposition.

AFTA would like to appeal to you to heed to their demands without delay. AFTA will be only pleased to assist you in this matter in whatever way possible.

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Thank you in anticipation of your speedy action.

Yours truly

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a long, sweeping horizontal line with a small upward curve at the end, and a few smaller, less distinct strokes above and below the main line.

Dr. Raga Ragavan
Chairperson
Australasian Federation of Tamil Associations Inc.

14 April 2009

CC: Hon Stephen Smith, Minister for Foreign Affairs
Hon Maxine McKew MP
Hon John Murphy MP
Hon Laurie Ferguson MP
Ms Julie Owens MP