

July 15, 2009

The Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Hon. Lawrence Cannon
Minister of Foreign Affairs
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Prime Minister Harper and Minister Cannon,

On behalf of the 120,000 members of our union, the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU), I am writing to you regarding the continuing humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka.

As you are no doubt aware, since January 2009 the United Nations and other independent observers have described the situation in Sri Lanka as a “humanitarian catastrophe”. Thousands of civilians were killed in recent months and many more are locked and languishing in camps without any sign of a release date.

At our June OPSEU Executive Board meeting, the Board passed a resolution to call on the Canadian government to do the following:

1. Ensure immediate access to the conflict zone and the mass civilian detention camps by the UN, international aid agencies, human rights organizations and the media;
2. Support internationally mediated negotiations to achieve a just and lasting political solution to the conflict;
3. Support a UN supervised investigation into war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by any party during the conflict ,and
4. Expedite immigration and refugee applications from Sri Lankans who have been displaced by the war and /or who have family in Canada

Despite repeated calls from the international community, the Sri Lankan government has continued to bar international humanitarian agencies, independent observers and journalists from its mass detention camps. As well, the human rights situation outside the conflict zones in Sri Lanka has deteriorated dramatically. Political opponents of the government and independent journalists have been subjected to threats, intimidation and assassination, regardless of their ethnic origin.

.....2

Prime Minister Harper and Minister Cannon
July 15, 2009
Page 2

There is an urgent need to respond to the humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka and to establish a long lasting resolution to the Sri Lankan conflict.

We ask that the Canadian government urge the Sri Lankan government to immediately allow aid organizations, human rights monitors and the media full access to camps containing approximately 300,000 Tamil civilians and to turn these camps over to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR); and similarly urge the United Nations, Commonwealth of Nations and other international actors to launch an independent, international investigation into war crimes committed during the last phase of the war in Sri Lanka.

OPSEU is aware of the complexity of the situation in Sri Lanka but we know that immediate actions must be taken on humanitarian grounds and a just negotiated settlement achieved as soon as possible. Therefore we ask you to exert whatever pressure you can on the government of Sri Lanka and other international agencies to take action and put an end to the suffering and pain of the people of Sri Lanka.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Warren (Smokey) Thomas
President

/bw

cc: Michael Ignatieff
Jack Layton
Gilles Duceppe