

# Rajapakse government bans Sri Lankan Tamil groups operating abroad

Wasantha Rupasinghe  
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The Sri Lankan government has suddenly banned 16 Tamil organisations operating overseas. This blatantly anti-democratic decision, announced on Tuesday, was made on the pretext that these groups are seeking to revive the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which was militarily defeated in May 2009.

Invoked in the name of fighting “terrorism,” the bans will not only be used to increase repression against Tamils but more broadly against the government’s political opponents and the working class as a whole.

Among the outlawed groups, branded as “foreign terrorists,” are the British Tamil Forum, Canadian Tamil Congress, Global Tamil Forum, Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam, Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation and World Tamil Movement, and Australian Tamil Congress. These groups are mainly operating from Western countries.

The Ministry of External Affairs declared that the order was made under United Nations Security Council resolution 1373, passed after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the US. This resolution gave sweeping powers to governments worldwide to suppress organisations by labelling them as “terrorist.”

External Affairs Minister G. L. Peiris said the order was based on a recommendation by the defence secretary, as the competent authority “regarding identification of persons, groups and entities believed on reasonable ground to be committing, attempting to commit, facilitating or participating in commission of acts of terrorism.”

Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse, President Mahinda Rajapakse’s brother, was among the most ruthless prosecutors of the anti-Tamil war in Sri Lanka’s north and east. Tens of thousands of people were killed during the final months of military operations alone.

According to the order, “all funds, assets and economic resources belonging to or owned by” these groups and related individuals have been frozen. Anyone who fails to comply will be “liable to heavy penalties.”

Military spokesman Ruwan Wanigasooriya insisted that “it will be illegal to have any contact with these organisations.” This declaration indicates that the order will be used to impose wide political restrictions. Political parties and Sri Lankan nationals will be forbidden from having any contact with the outlawed entities.

The government will also ask the countries where these groups are operating to investigate them, identify their funding and list their members with Interpol as being wanted for arrest for terrorist activity.

The Rajapakse government made this move after last month’s UN Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva passed a US-sponsored resolution calling for the UN Human Rights Commissioner to investigate the human rights violations and war crimes committed by the military and other government officials during the war against the LTTE.

Rajapakse’s government has sought to whip up nationalist sentiment and Sinhala chauvinism by repeatedly claiming that there is a Western-backed “foreign conspiracy” against Sri Lanka, supported by Tamil diaspora groups.

The government accuses these groups of persuading the US and other major powers to call for an international war crimes investigation. All these organisations are politically pro-imperialist and appeal for the support of the major global powers to pressure the Colombo government into a power-sharing deal with the Tamil elite in the island’s north and east. Some advocate a separate Tamil state.

The same major powers helped the government crush the LTTE by outlawing it, crippling its fund raising, and arresting and jailing key figures, as well as providing Colombo with military hardware and sharing intelligence.

Far from having any belated concern for the democratic rights of the Tamil masses, the US pushed for last month's resolution as a means of prevailing on the Rajapakse government to ditch its close political, military and economic relations with Beijing. This is part of the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia"—a diplomatic and military drive to undermine China's influence particularly in Asia. If Rajapakse toes Washington's line, the US will immediately drop all allegations against Colombo.

The outlawing of Tamil organisations goes hand in hand with a resumed brutal crackdown on Tamils, particularly in the Northern Province. Since early last month, the military has been deployed for house-to-house searches and interrogations, especially of young people. Roadblocks have reappeared, checking movements of people and vehicles.

The army is also patrolling beaches, and telling fishermen that a pass system will be reintroduced. The military claims that "terrorists" may come and go via the sea between Sri Lanka's northern shores and India's southern coast. During the protracted civil war, deep-sea fishing was banned and fishermen were restricted to certain areas.

*Veerakesari*, a Tamil daily, reported this week that more than 40 people had been arrested in the north since early last month. In a return to the kind of repression carried out throughout the war, the police Terrorist Investigation Division took them into custody. Some of the prisoners are believed to be detained under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act.

While the Rajapakse government is desperately seeking to counter the diplomatic offensive launched by the US and its allies, its main aim is to stir up anti-Tamil sentiment. Successive Sri Lankan governments have deliberately exploited communal politics against Tamils, which fuelled the onset of civil war in 1983, to divide the working class and prevent a unified struggle against capitalist rule.

Despite defeating the LTTE five years ago, the government and the ruling class still rely on provoking communal divisions to divert mounting political

discontent and opposition among workers, youth and poor to its deepening attacks on their living conditions via the austerity measures prescribed by the International Monetary Fund.

Last weekend's Western and Southern Provincial elections registered a sharp decline in votes for Rajapakse's ruling coalition, following a series of social struggles that erupted in the lead-up to the elections.

Workers everywhere must oppose the government's anti-democratic and repressive moves and forge the unity of the working class, across ethnic lines, to fight the Rajapakse government's offensive. This struggle needs to be based on socialist policies, against the government's capitalist program.



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