

# Workers and students in northern Sri Lanka oppose the US-Israeli war against Iran

Our correspondents  
1 June 2026

Members and supporters of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) are campaigning among workers, students, small traders, farmers and fishermen in northern Sri Lanka for an upcoming public meeting in Jaffna on the US-Israeli war against Iran.

The meeting, titled “Stop the US-Israeli criminal war on Iran,” will be held on Tuesday, June 9, at 4 p.m. at the YMCA Hall in Jaffna. A protest organised by the SEP/IYSSE on the same theme will also be held near the Jaffna bus stand on Monday, June 8, at 4 p.m.

The Jaffna meeting follows meetings in Colombo, Peradeniya, Hatton in the plantation district, and the southern town of Matara. These events are part of the international campaign launched by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) to build a socialist anti-war movement based on the international working class.

SEP and IYSSE campaigners conducted extensive discussions with workers, youth, farmers and fishermen in various areas, including Chunnakam, Jaffna University, Kilinochchi and Kayts Island. The discussions focused on the US-led war against Iran, the escalating militarism of the US and other imperialist powers, preparations for a broader conflict against China and Russia, and the deepening global economic crisis that is both driving the war and being intensified by it.

While engaging in a fraudulent negotiation process with Iran, the Trump administration is escalating war provocations against the country. At the same time, Israel is relentlessly bombing Lebanon and moving to permanently occupy Gaza. Many people had illusions in Trump’s negotiations, but SEP/IYSSE campaigners explained the fraudulent character of the talks and warned that the US could resume attacks on Iran at any time. They pointed out that it is the crisis of capitalism itself that has driven US imperialism into launching a world war.

Those who spoke with the SEP and IYSSE are already suffering the catastrophic global consequences of the war—soaring prices of essentials, including fuel, and rising electricity bills. Tamil people in the north, moreover, have been through the devastating experience of three decades of communal war waged by successive Sri Lankan governments

against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The campaigners also exposed the role of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/National People’s Power (JVP/NPP) government of President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, which has aligned itself with the US-led war while imposing its economic burden on working people, on top of IMF-dictated austerity measures. Last weekend, the government increased fuel prices again.

The SEP and IYSSE members explained the pro-imperialist politics of the Tamil bourgeois nationalist parties, which represent the interests of the Tamil bourgeoisie. The Jaffna University Students Union shares the politics of the Tamil nationalist parties, which tacitly back the US-Israeli war—in sharp contrast to the students who voiced strong opposition.

**Kanthasami Vinothan**, a final-year Arts student, said: “US imperialism wants to dominate the world and is therefore waging war in the Middle East. But we oppose war and it must be stopped. It cannot be stopped through the United Nations or the European Union as they support the war.”

He said he had not previously had a political perspective on how to stop wars, but after discussing the issue with the SEP he now believes that the international working class must be mobilised.

**S. Dharmaseelan**, a 45-year-old small trader from Kilinochchi, explained how his small grocery business has collapsed due to soaring prices. “Fuel prices have skyrocketed and food prices are increasing every day. The US is responsible for this. A bag of dried chilies which was 14,400 rupees [\$US43.50] now costs 26,500 rupees [\$US80]. The price of milk powder has increased again. People do not have money. Workers buy only a few items on payday.

“I have four children, including a disabled child. Their monthly education expenses alone exceed 10,000 rupees. Nutrition has become unaffordable. Fish prices have risen to between 1,800 and 2,000 rupees per kilo, and beef is about 2,500 rupees.”

Condemning the JVP/NPP government, he declared: “This government made many promises during the elections, but now we see no difference from previous governments. There are no solutions for ordinary people.”

Supporting the SEP's call for building an anti-war movement and independent workers' action committees, Dharmaseelan declared: "We must unite and stop this war. If the US war on Iran is not stopped, we will perish from hunger, famine and war."

**K. Dilasson**, a 26-year-old fisherman from Punguduthivu, said people are borrowing money just to repay old debts. Commenting on the increase in fuel prices, he explained: "An ordinary worker traveling to Jaffna [daily for work] spends most of his salary on fuel. Even if we earn 20,000 rupees from fishing, nearly half of it goes to kerosene and machinery repairs. Previously, 1,000 rupees was enough for a family to survive for a day but now it doesn't even cover a single meal [for the family]."

**S. Joseph Gnanarathnam**, a small textile trader, immediately denounced the war, saying: "This war is dangerous. We are all affected by it. It must be stopped."

He recalled his experiences during Colombo's civil war against the LTTE: "In 1998, I lost goods worth 1.5 million rupees when the ship carrying them was attacked. We experienced economic sanctions, shortages of fuel and electricity, and rising prices. The impact of the war against Iran will be even worse."

Another businessman said that the war is being fought in the interests of the rich in the US. "Israel is helping them to seize oil resources. Our businesses are collapsing because people can no longer afford anything except essentials." Condemning the Tamil parties, he added: "Tamil parties will always stand with the US and European powers. That is their politics."

After a discussion on the SEP's program, **M. Rishmi**, a shopkeeper, declared: "America has no right to wage war on Iran. I support building an international anti-war movement based on a socialist program and independent action committees."

**J. Jayanthan**, a 54-year-old three-wheel taxi driver, said: "The claim that Iran was developing nuclear weapons is a lie. The US itself possesses nuclear weapons. The US previously plundered Venezuela's oil resources. Now they are trying to take Iran's oil. I don't know where this will end, but they are destroying the world," he said.

He also described his worsening financial situation: "I have three school-age children. My daily income is around 2,000 rupees, sometimes even less. Fuel prices are destroying our livelihood. We are falling into debt because of education expenses and vehicle repairs."

Jayanthan rejected attempts by Tamil nationalist politicians to justify their support for the war and blame Sinhalese people for the communal war in Sri Lanka: "Ordinary Sinhalese, Muslim or Iranian people are not responsible for the crimes committed by governments. I do not agree with Tamil politicians who support this war for their own interests."

**K. Vinusan**, a fisherman from Kilinochchi, said: "We were caught in a civil war and so I understand the dangers that the

people of Iran, Gaza and Lebanon face.

"Women, children and the elderly in those countries have been killed by US bombing. We also lived as refugees. I think those people will also experience the same. There will be epidemics and starvation in the refugee camps. Those people will be unable to cope. This cruel war must be stopped immediately.

"During the war in 2009, I saw the elders and women being killed in Mathalan. The same thing is happening [in the Middle East]. When the bombs are dropped, the elderly people and children die of suffocation from the toxic smoke. It happened in Mathalan and is happening in Iran.

"I support the anti-war movement advocated by the Socialist Equality Party. As part of that, the program to form action committees among workers is good because, as you say, all the old organisations betray workers and the masses," he said.

**E. Dwarakam**, 29, who is studying electrical engineering and works part-time as a security guard at the Electricity Board, declared: "First of all, I strongly oppose and condemn this war of aggression waged by the US and Israel against Iran. People are being killed there every day. Just as our Tamil people were massacred in Mullivaikal at the end of the war in Sri Lanka, people are currently being killed in Iran and massacred in Gaza.

"Most importantly, it is barbaric to bomb a school where children are studying and kill them. This is the democracy that America teaches the world. The US is using its military power to create unrest in the entire world. Now this war has caused major crises all over the world. Accordingly, in Sri Lanka, we are also facing repeated increases in the prices of fuel and essential commodities.

"Our salaries have not been increased but only the prices of goods are increasing. My travel expenses for my studies alone cost 12,000–15,000 rupees per month. This has created a situation where we cannot live. Therefore, this war must be stopped immediately. I don't trust the ceasefire negotiations because similar negotiations took place in our country, but nothing was able to stop the war.

"Therefore, if we want to end the wars that are happening now, everyone must come into the struggle. In other words, as you mention, the working class all over the world must get involved in this."



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