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Sri Lanka

Greens/EFA motion for a resolution

Tabled by ***Jean Lambert, Frithjof Schmidt, Raül Romeva i Rueda, Hélène Flautre***

on behalf of the Greens/EFA Group

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the declaration of Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner of 8 January 2009 and of Commissioner Louis Michel of 29 January 2009,

- having regard to the findings of the International Press Freedom Mission published on 27 January 2009,

- having regard to the declaration of President Mahinda Rajapaksa on 29 January assuring "save passage to all those living in the North and in conflict areas in particular",

A. Whereas since the military offensive of the Singalese army against the Tamil separatist fighters of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE) started on 8 October 2008, the LTTE has been pushed back into its last stronghold the Northern Wanni area,

B. Whereas hundreds of people have been killed in the fighting between government troops and the LTTE in recent weeks and an estimated 250 000 mostly Tamil internally displaced have been trapped in the combat zone,

C. Whereas those civilians have been deprived of the most basic medical care, food and shelter and while the LTTE has been accused of not allowing the population to leave the danger zone, the Government has reportedly detained those who managed to flee LTTE areas in militarized detention camps,

D. Whereas on 23 January Upali Tennakoon, Editor-In-Chief of the privately-owned Sinhala weekly newspaper Rivira known for his articles denouncing human rights abuses and corruption, and his wife were attacked and wounded by four men on motorcycles,

E. Whereas the assault happened just two weeks after the murder of Lasantha Wickrematunge, founder and Chief Editor of the Sunday Leader newspaper as well as lawyer, who was equally a vocal critic of corruption and abuse of authority in Sri Lanka as well as of Government policies in the ongoing military conflict ,

F. Whereas the International Press Freedom Mission to Sri Lanka notes three trends in connection with reporting on the conflict: lack of press access and independent information flow in the conflict zone,

assaults and intimidation of journalists covering the conflict and self-censorship by the media,

G. Whereas President Rajapaksa called Mr. Wickrematunga publically a "terrorist journalist" which comes down to a public incitement to hatred,

H. Whereas an increasing atmosphere of censorship and fear is combined with"culture of impunity and indifference" in the face of killings and attacks on journalists in Sri Lanka,

I. Whereas at least 14 journalists have been killed and many more abducted or arrested since 2006 and whereas Reporters Without Borders ranked Sri Lanka 165 out of 173 countries in its 2008 press freedom index,

1. Calls on the government and the LTTE to abide by the laws of war, to minimize harms to civilians during military operations and to immediately allow the thousands of civilians trapped in the conflict zone safe passage and access to humanitarian aid;

2. Calls on President Rajapaksa to honour his commitments on save passage and calls on the Sri Lankan authorities to give the internally displaced refuge in respect of fundamental human rights;

3. Expresses its grave concern over the situation of those remaining trapped in the Wanni war zone, particularly in view of the government ban on all UN organisations and almost all humanitarian NGOs, as well as journalists or human rights monitors to enter the North;

4. Wonders about the genuine willingness of the military to minimize civilian casualties in view of its blanket denial of any civilian deaths, contrary to all testimony by doctors still active in the area;

5. Strongly condemns the murder of Mr. Wickrematunge and the attack against Mr. Tennakoon; calls on the government to put an end to all acts of harassment against all human rights defenders, journalists and humanitarian workers in Sri Lanka and to conform with the provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders;

6. Demands an impartial and thorough investigation into the two crimes in order to identify all those responsible, bring them before a civil competent and impartial tribunal and apply to them the penal sanctions provided by the law; calls on the Government to guarantee the future safety of Mr. Tennakoon;

7. Believes that a military victory over the LTTE will not spare the need for finding a political solution to the ethnic problems shaking Sri Lanka in order to endure a lasting peace;

8. Expresses notably its concern that the Rajapaksa government has imposed numerous decisions on the Tamil and Muslim population in the East and in the North without any attempt of political inclusion, notably the de-merger of the north and the east, the appointment of a new Sinhalese-dominated provincial administration, a major role of the military in civilian affairs, development plans that foresee large-scale changes to the east, local government and provincial council elections;

9. Calls therefore on the government to implement important devolution measures and to ensure that the ethnic Tamils and the Muslim minority get rights and privileges at par with others;

10. NRPARAMSGInstructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the government of Sri Lanka, the other SAARC countries and the LTTE.

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