

STATEMENT BY A GROUP OF CONCERNED SRI LANKANS

We have come together as a concerned group of Sri Lankans recognizing that we are living at a time when momentous events are shaping the destiny of our country. The recent trends and developments in all parts of the country will determine the course of the future for many generations to come. It is a time which calls for sustained vigilance and constructive action on the part of all citizens.

The prospect of a successful end to the war and the brutal violence we have experienced during the last three decades has brought an immense feeling of relief to all our people. We applaud the valour and sacrifice of the armed forces in creating the conditions for the restoration of democracy. In the words of President Mahinda Rajapakse in his Independence Day speech, the end of the war ushers us into a new future of expectations - a future that can truly fulfil the promise of our independence. These feelings however are tempered by the deep anguish and helplessness we feel at the plight of our fellow citizens who have been held captive by the LTTE. The efforts that have been made to ensure safe passage to these civilians out of the war zone should be redoubled and repeated.

The acts of violence against the media and the killings of the journalists including the brutal murder of the chief editor of the Sunday Leader have appalled all peace loving citizens and seem to portend a different darker future. They are acts directed against the basic right that citizens enjoy in a democracy to express their views and opinions freely on public issues and be critical of government and other groups. They appear to signify a dangerous trend that can undermine the foundation of democracy and lead to a regime in which individual freedom for dissent and disagreement is suppressed with violence and murder.

The main challenges facing the government, the political parties and civil society as a whole are those of fulfilling the expectations generated by the events in the North and dispelling the grave fears and doubts that have arisen in the wake of the many recent acts of violence against the exercise of democratic rights.

It is imperative that the end of the war be celebrated without a trace of triumphalism and without any racial or partisan overtones. It must be celebrated as a victory of democracy and freedom over a regime of terrorism and suppression of freedom, a victory in which all communities can share. All public and official events around the conclusion of the war must be sensitive to the aspirations of every community and become a means of forging a genuine foundation of national harmony. Above all, as stated by the President, the victory has to be seen as the restoration of the sovereignty of the people in the North and the East and this has to be demonstrated through political institutions of genuine participatory democracy based on

the principle of subsidiarity throughout the country. The victory of democracy over terrorism will be hollow if it is not followed by these political reforms.

The constitutional safeguards for good governance as provided for in the 17th amendment such as the Constitutional Council and the Elections Commission need to be effectively activated without delay and the freedom of speech and the media protected through new legislation which includes the right to information.

The fruits of peace should result in accelerated economic growth and human development which will raise the standards of living of people in all parts of the country, equitably.

Managing the future that is emerging requires a profound transformation of our politics and full commitment to the core human values of a just society. The challenges we face transcend the narrow partisan agendas of gaining or retaining power. We urge all political parties to rise above divisive partisan rivalry, forge a national consensus and commit themselves collectively to deal with the critical issues that face the country. In this regard the two main parties have a special responsibility.

The primary responsibility for leading this country into this new era is borne by the elected President, Mahinda Rajapakse. In as much as he has brought the divided parts of the country together, the task of bringing the people of the country together through the just fulfilment of the social economic political and cultural aspirations of all, lies with him. We pledge our full support to all efforts that lead to this end.

**Signatories to the Statement by
A Group of Concerned Sri Lankans**

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