

## DOCUMENTS

Leaders of Sri Lanka's business community recently launched a new initiative, calling on main political parties to work-out a unified approach to national policy in political and economic spheres. The following is the text of their declaration.

# TO THE LEADERS OF ALL POLITICAL PARTIES IN SRI LANKA

We the members of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Sri Lanka, the Employers' Organisations and the Trade Associations comprising:

The Ceylon Chamber of Commerce  
The National Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka  
The Ceylon National Chamber of Industries  
Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Sri Lanka  
The Employers' Federation of Ceylon  
The Exporters' Association of Sri Lanka

representing the business community, wish to make the following declaration:

Despite successive governments identifying us, the private sector, as the engine of growth, and despite the fact that a period of over 20 years of open economy has passed, we are concerned that Sri Lanka has still not achieved the desired level of sustained economic progress. Unemployment, lack of housing, poverty, lack of infrastructure development amongst a host of other problems, foremost of which is the ethnic problem, remain unresolved to the detriment of the country. We deem it necessary therefore, to urge all political parties to adopt a common policy framework to enable the private sector to perform its role more effectively and to ensure that future generations of Sri Lankans can hope for a better life.

We propose that a common and unified approach be taken by all political parties on the following:

1. The effective resolution of the North-East conflict.
2. Ensuring that there is no discrimination. Ensuring equality for all Sri Lankan citizens irrespective of race, gender, political affiliations, religion etc.,
3. Ensure personal security and peace for all Sri Lankans.
4. Introduce the use of English as a link language and legislate for English to be also an official language.
5. Ensure the power and independence of the Public Service Commission, Judicial Services Commission and the Police Service.
6. Ensure that white/green papers are published prior to legislation for open public debate on all important national issues.

7. Agree to a set of common policy criteria which would remain unchanged for a minimum term of 15 years unless otherwise agreed to by both Government & Opposition, thus ensuring the continuity of policy with regard to the following:

- a) Agriculture
- b) Industry
- c) Trade & Commerce.

8. To introduce reforms in labour laws and practice to conform to current business needs.

Specific areas requiring urgent attention are:

- a) Labour market flexibility
- b) Reduction in the number of holidays
- c) Equality of rights and obligations of both employers and employees, and
- d) Linking remuneration to productivity

9. To support and implement the adoption of required educational reforms.

10. Formulate and implement National Economic Plans in consultation with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Employers' Organisations and Trade Associations.

We are of the considered opinion that the above proposals should be agreed by all political parties and implemented before the dawn of the new millennium.

Ken Balendra-Chairman, The Ceylon Chamber of Commerce  
Armyne Wirasinha-President, The National Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka  
Nimal Samarakkody- Chairman, The Ceylon National Chamber of Industries  
Patrick Amarasinghe-President, Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Sri Lanka  
Nigel Austin-President-Elect, The Employers' Federation of Ceylon  
Lyn Fernando-Chairman, The Exporters' Association of Sri Lanka  
Deshamanya Lalith Kotelawala-Co-ordinating Chairman, Ceylinco Group

## STATEMENT FROM THE WOMENS COALITION FOR PEACE

At a time when regions in the world from Ireland to the Middle East are seeking peace, Sri Lanka continues to descend deeper into a war that is no longer justifiable by any stretch of the imagination. Increasingly the Sri Lankan people are not persuaded by either the Governments or the LTTEs claims of victory. The Sri Lankan people are well aware that no political party or militant group can solve the conflict alone. It is therefore time that the leaders of the country work towards a peaceful solution of the conflict, which is exacting an enormous cost in both human and economic terms and is brutalising our society. Excluding the loss of lives on both sides incurred in the latest fighting at Kilinochchi and Mankulam, the official (under)estimate is that the war in Sri Lanka has killed over 60,000, while between one and a half million persons have been internally displaced (not taking into account those who are refugees abroad) at various times in the north and east.

Women have suffered disproportionately due to the escalation of generalized violence and the militarization of Sri Lankan society. They have been subject to rape and other forms of sexual abuse particularly at check points. They have been traumatized by the loss of family members, their mobility severely curtailed by the deteriorating security situation, and consequently have found it increasingly difficult to go about their everyday lives, engage in income generating activities, and support and sustain themselves and their families. The deteriorating transport, health, and educational services in the war zones makes it increasingly difficult for women heads of households to support their children.

The Womens Coalition for Peace, comprising women of all classes and of all political, ethnic, and religious communities are against the carnage and senseless destruction of more than fifteen years of war in Sri Lanka. The Coalition works towards restoring peace in Sri Lanka. In so doing it seeks to ensure that womens voices are not only heard in the peace process, but also inform the direction of the peace process.

The Coalition calls upon:

- 1) The Peoples Alliance Government and the Opposition to rise above using the conflict and the war for political gain, to build an atmosphere of cooperation towards collective problem solving, and to restore civility to national politics.
- 2) The Government and the Opposition to arrive at a consensus on constitutional reforms aimed at satisfying the democratic and peaceful aspirations of all Sri Lankans.
- 3) The Government and the LTTE to take steps towards resuming peace talks.
- 4) The Government and the Opposition to work together to seek third party facilitation to promote negotiations between the parties and all other political groups and interests concerned with the conflict.
- 5) The LTTE to take into consideration the immense loss of life, livelihood, displacement and insecurity of the Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim communities in the country and the aspirations for peace expressed by all people living in the conflict areas, and to begin a process towards the re-commencement of the peace talks.