

Item 5: Language, education & empowerment of minority women and girls

Association Bharathi Centre Culturel Franco-Tamoul

Speaker: Dr Nilanthi Kanapathipillai

Tamils have long faced discrimination within the education system in Sri Lanka. Tamil women face the dual edge sword of an oppressive patriarchy in a country with deep rooted and long standing divisions in caste, sex, race and fundamentally language. Tamil is one of the oldest languages to exist and our very language and culture is under risk of extinction in Gotabaya Rajapaksa's Sri Lanka. There has been little progress since the 1978 constitution declaring Sinhala as the "only" official language of the state and the deliberate torching of the Jaffna public library, with over 97,000 irreplaceable Tamil books and manuscripts by an organized Sinhala mob is one of the most violent examples of ethnic Biblioclasm of the 20th century.

Outside of recruiting women to frontline combat positions during Sri Lanka's 10 year war, whereby women from all caste had a rare opportunity for equal expression - Sri Lanka's political divisions have targeted our vulnerable sex and still do to this date.

Prominent LTTE Media frontwoman Isapriya was brutally raped and murdered by Kamal Guneratne's troops in May 2009. Though captured on video, there has been no liability to this date. Guneratne now sits as newly elected defense Secretary in Rajapaksa's Sri Lanka.

Concerns exist with thousands of similar violations of human rights of Tamil women in Sri Lanka perpetrated by the country's armed militias.

They are an expression of the discrimination against a whole people, part of a strategy of war and in its gender based nature as part of a systemic structural relationship of domination and subjugation based on racism.

It is the weakest section of the population that has suffered the most: 90 % of the war victims were Tamil civilians, in their majority women and children. Moreover, thousands of women have been made widows, most of them in their early twenties who with or without small children are driven into destitution, left to fend for themselves in a countryside that is ruined, under continuous threat of indiscriminate harassment by the armed forces and their militias.

I appeal to Madam Chair and High commissioner Michelle Bachelet as women and humanitarians of the United Nations Human Rights body to cease trade and governmental alliances with Rajapaksa's Sri Lanka, until the countries new president is tried for war crimes, and human rights abuses in the international criminal court against Sri Lanka's most vulnerable – Tamil women.