

## **European Initiative for a Negotiated Peace in Sri Lanka**

The European Initiative for a Negotiated Peace in Sri Lanka greets delegates to the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 14th-23rd February 2006. We are aware of the WCC's commitment to the Decade for Overcoming Violence, as also its long track record in working for peace with justice and human rights in the context of promoting positive inter-community and inter-religious relations. We have also noted that the focus of the Asian Churches preparatory meeting for the Assembly, held 22nd-25th November at Tomohon, Indonesia was on "Building Communities of Peace", in which a number of case studies featured, including that of Sri Lanka.

Because of all this, at this critical time for the Peace Process in Sri Lanka, we look to delegates at the Assembly to support the clear preconditions for peacemaking which are that, if there is to be peace with justice and real security for people, then representatives of the principal parties to deeply-rooted conflicts cannot avoid dealing with each other, while external parties can either positively facilitate this, or negatively undermine it. On the 22nd and 23rd February, the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) meet in Geneva for face-to-face talks. This will be the first time in 3 years that such direct talks are taking place.

The Cease Fire Agreement (CFA) in the island has lasted 4 years. However, this and the Norwegian facilitated Peace Process in Sri Lanka has been in crisis for some time, with growing violence threatening to break out into full scale war. This is in an international setting in which, as one of the Assembly's background documents points out: "The concern for security has become the dominant motif for individual as well as social and political decisions. More and more, traditional approaches based on the notion of national security and its defence by military means seem to be gaining the upper hand once again and tend to supplant the insight that the main objective should be security for people and not only for the state."

Thus, in September 2005, the British presidency of the European Union (EU) issued a statement imposing a travel ban on official delegations of LTTE. Moreover, it was indicated that the EU will actively consider proscription of the LTTE as a "terrorist organization". Such a position represents a paradigmatic shift in EU policy and encourages those political forces in Sri Lanka that are calling for a military solution to the underlying conflicts of the island and which support a chauvinist response to the suffering and aspirations of the Tamil people.

As the same Assembly document quoted above expresses it: "Often, religious loyalties connected with ethnic identity are being used for purposes of legitimizing and mobilizing in situations of violent power conflicts" while, at the same time, "All religious communities and traditions are facing the expectation and the challenge to show the way towards peace and overcoming violence. " It is therefore of great importance that the committed efforts for peace with justice of all people of goodwill in Sri Lanka, whether of Buddhist, Hindu, Christian or Muslim background, are supported and not undermined by actions from within the international community.

In this connection, we note the 8th February 2006 initiative taken from within the Christian community by the Conference of Major Religious Superiors of Sri Lanka (CMRS) in meeting with the Political Wing of the LTTE's Peace Secretariat. Such forms of engagement by religious community groups within Sri Lanka contrast with what appears to be the emerging approach of EU governments. However, the European Initiative for a Negotiated Peace in Sri Lanka is aware that many Non-Governmental Organizations in Europe believe that the EU can and should take a much more positive and constructive approach in support of the openings that were created through the Norwegian-facilitated Peace Process.

In addition, from discussions with European diplomats, the Initiative also believes that, in a number of EU countries there is a positive will to make a constructive and supportive contribution, building on their continued commitment to alleviating the suffering and promoting the development of people of all backgrounds in Sri Lanka whose lives were so tragically affected by the Tsunami coming on top of the previous years of violence.

Because of all the above, the European Initiative for a Negotiated Peace in Sri Lanka requests the delegates attending the Assembly of the World Council of Churches to exercise what Assembly documents identify as a Christian vocation of "walking in truth and speaking with power" and to this by supporting our call to the EU to lift the travel ban on official visits of LTTE delegations to the EU, and also that it should not to take the extremely destabilising step of banning the LTTE in Europe.

We ask the delegates to take this message to their respective Churches and organisations. We also call on the Assembly at this critical point in time to issue a message of support for peace with justice in Sri Lanka, urging the parties meeting in Geneva to identify and grasp possible ways forward that do not involve violence and further suffering for the peoples of the island.

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11th February 2006

On behalf of:

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