

**Part III**  
**On Media & Censorship**



# Paper 10

## The World Media and Ethnic Conflicts

by Mr. Vasantha Raja

I am presenting this paper at a time when the whole world is going through one of the most enlightening – though tragic – experiences ever, and one which has tremendous implications for the world organization, the UN, as well as for the world media.

Of course, I am talking about Kosovo.

And I am referring to the human obligations of UN officials, and the world media, to help avoid Kosovo-type catastrophes and NATO-type military operations in the future, while helping at the same time to defend the democratic rights and human rights of oppressed minority people.

It is interesting that in the later stages of the crisis, NATO, in a sense, has started to re-interpret the objective of its attack as an effort to prevent ethnic cleansing. But at the beginning, NATO politicians were seen referring to the KLA as 'freedom fighters' and forcefully defending the Kosovars' democratic rights, including the right to independence.

The Kosovo crisis indeed is an eye-opener for every democrat and every humanitarian.

Even those who vigorously opposed NATO intervention have had to dissociate themselves from what Milosovic has been doing to Kosovars. They were merely arguing about better ways of achieving NATO objectives.

Nobody could challenge the Kosovars' right to self-determination, including the right to independence, although alternatives to total independence, at least as a temporary measure, are being discussed on pragmatic grounds.

So the obvious question is, how do we defend the democratic rights of minority people and secure their existence against chauvinist threats in such a manner that NATO-type military operations are rendered unnecessary?

One clear answer is to strengthen the UN mandate and international law, enabling the UN's effective intervention on behalf of abused minority people *vis-à-vis* the dominant sections of people within sovereign states – in other words, removing the existing inconsistencies in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

It may also be useful to enlighten the editors of powerful world media networks such as CNN, BBC and SKY of their humanitarian obligation to make a special effort to inform the world community about the true nature of Kosovo-type conflicts raging in many parts of the world, thus enabling the United Nations to intervene effectively to make sure minority people's aspirations are being realized through democratic means. For instance, Scotland's aspirations are being re-

alized through democratic means and I shall describe this in detail later.

It is in this context and spirit that I would like to raise some issues in relation to the world's media giants.

As a Sri Lankan deeply affected by the country's ethnic conflict, I cannot but discuss my topic with special reference to Sri Lanka, even though my observations have direct relevance to many ethnic conflicts around the world.

Therefore, nobody should complain if my presentation ends up as a contribution to the growing chorus of appeals from concerned Sri Lankans to world media giants such as the BBC, CNN and SKY networks to show more interest in the continuing human catastrophe in Sri Lanka caused by the ethnic conflict there.

For, we are gravely disturbed by the somewhat baffling lack of concern shown by the world media to developments related to the ongoing ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

Our appeal is not to conduct propaganda on behalf of any side to our conflict, but to provide adequate space within your news/current-affairs formats to keep the international community properly informed about the true brutality of the ongoing war. As the world media's wide-ranging coverage of the Kosovo crisis has shown, it is clear how effectively the media can mobilize world opinion in order to ease the suffering of hundreds of thousands of refugees, and also to influence decision-makers on all sides to strive to achieve peace with justice.

It is only to be expected that many Tamils in Sri Lanka will wonder why some oppressed minorities around the world have to go on suffering for decades without anyone noticing, while others attract world attention almost immediately.

It is, of course, true that even the conflict between the Kosovars and the Serbs only began

to receive urgent coverage from the world media when US and western governments' involvement in the Balkans started to gather momentum.

This is understandable in some ways. The events in the area did begin to assume immense international significance with direct implications for the west, and thereby for the world.

Obviously, the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka cannot reasonably be expected to achieve that same level of significance, or anywhere near it, within the international media.

But the point is not that. The point is that the world media's ridiculously minimal coverage of the dragging war in Sri Lanka – in proportion to the scale of the human tragedy – is nothing less than scandalous.

And, even the occasional reporting we get is lop-sided and selective in favor of one side of the conflict – namely the state.

It is as if the world's media giants have somehow become unwitting partners in prolonging the human tragedy in Sri Lanka.

Out of the ostensible factors responsible for this media bias, the most prominent one seems to be common prejudices shared by most westerners against armed struggles within what are internationally-recognized 'democratic' states friendly to the west.

There is also the prevalent opinion of some reputable 'think-tanks' that the independence struggles carried out by 'subordinate' people's within states dominated by 'majority' people's are the real culprits in the disruption of world peace at present.

Hence the tendency among most opinion-makers to subscribe to chauvinist regimes' efforts to criminalize liberation movements as terrorist organizations.

Western governments, led by the US, tend to help states that are threatened by such freedom

struggles, ostensibly in the interests of world stability. But as long as this mind-set is firmly in place, at the top-most level of western establishments, it is only natural for the west's media giants to share the prejudices that flow from it.

In this respect, the present Sri Lankan government of Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranayake Kumaratunga has had no difficulty in convincing the west that her government's so-called 'war for peace' to eliminate a 'bunch of terrorists' is a necessary evil that her armed forces have been forced to carry out.

Hence, neither the Tamils nor the LTTE independence fighters have any hopes of securing the sympathy and favors that the Kosovars and the KLA have obtained from the west, even though the conditions and the principles involved in both conflicts are very similar, (if anything, the Tamils' plight was, and is, immeasurably worse in terms of duration and atrocities inflicted upon the Kosovars.)

The west's bias against the LTTE, the Sri Lankan state's hiring of western PR firms to place 'anti-terrorist' news items on its behalf, and the clamping of stringent rules and regulations by the state barring journalists from the war-zone and making foreign journalists dependent on military press briefings – all these factors have combined to produce a very sad state of affairs indeed: even the sporadic coverage of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka in the world media begins to look like a conspiracy to back one party to the conflict.

However, fortunately for Tamils and their leadership, the 'Kosovo experience' in the west looks set, hopefully, to help change the western perception of similar conflicts quite dramatically. It is becoming clear that it is Milosovic-type regimes which are the real threat to peace and not the democratic aspirations of subordi-

nate people.

An extremely healthy international awareness that is emerging at present, giving priority to human rights considerations over the sovereignty of states, may provide campaigners like us with new arguments to convince the media giants of the necessity to adopt new guidelines for covering Kosovo-type conflicts in other parts of the world. I shall return to this point later.

The world media today is dominated by a few English-speaking television and radio networks and news-agencies based in the west. Rapidly-developing communication technology keeps enhancing the unprecedented powers these institutions possess in informing about world developments instantaneously to the world community, and, thereby, shaping world opinion.

Although it is true that the fast-increasing power of the Internet continues to undermine the hitherto monopoly of disseminating information by those with power, money and 'contacts,' still, the impact of moving pictures and information that reaches millions through CNN, the BBC and SKY is unmatched.

To their credit, it must be admitted that the services these TV networks provide for the world community – through constantly refining journalistic technique – are quite unique. (As Arthur C. Clark observes about the dramatic growth of communication technology: gone are the days when some dictators can keep their country-folk indefinitely in the dark.)

Whatever the limitations these TV networks have in reflecting today's fast changing world, they are the best humankind has at present for disseminating information in a 'balanced' way.

They are sensitive to many universally-accepted democratic values. They are sensitive to the norms of the journalistic profession. And they are sensitive to criticism. (My close mon-

itoring of the coverage of the NATO attack on Yugoslavia by the three media giants, namely CNN, BBC News24 and SKY, has convinced me that they are making a commendable effort, despite some reservations, to inform their viewers about what is really going on.)

For one thing, they are in tough competition with each other to grab the biggest portion of the world audience in this communication age of ours, and – mind you – winning credibility is the strongest factor in this business.

Perhaps that factor, more than anything else, makes sure that they try their best to be seen as impartial and objective.

Let me make two assertions at this stage:

One: since I consider the moving pictures of the BBC, CNN and SKY TV to be the most powerful and dominant feature of the world media, I have these networks in mind when I refer to ‘world media’ from now on, even though, most of my observations are valid with regard to a number of influential journals and radio networks as well.

Two: whatever the deficiencies I want to point out in this contribution, I would do so in a constructive spirit in the hope that our concerns would not be totally ignored by the editors of networks’ South Asia desks.

Sri Lanka may be a tiny country in a remote corner of the world. But the ethnic conflict that has been dragging on for over a decade now in that island is one instance of the most significant world phenomenon currently hampering the peace and welfare of the globe since the Second World War.

Not only has this phenomenon caused unprecedented levels of refugee crises in many parts of the world, and inflicted enormous pain upon millions of people, it has also raised some fundamental democratic issues involving the emer-

gence of a new world order, which has brought into conflict the sovereignty principle with the rights of minority people within established states.

Let me quote from Noam Chomsky’s recent article ‘*Behind the Rhetoric.*’ He says: “... there is at least a tension, if not an outright contradiction, between the rules of world order laid down in the UN Charter and the rights articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UD) .... The Charter bans force violating state sovereignty; the UD guarantees the rights of individuals against oppressive states. The issue of ‘humanitarian intervention’ arises from this tension. It is the right of ‘humanitarian intervention’ that is claimed by the US/NATO in Kosovo, and that is generally supported by editorial opinion and news reports (in the latter case, reflexively, even by the very choice of terminology).”

I shall talk about the significance of this point in relation to the role of world media in similar cases later in this paper. For the time being let me mention a few things to elaborate the situation within the Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka, which dwarfs the Kosovo conflict in terms of the humanitarian crisis caused – at least prior to the NATO bombing campaign:

Large-scale military operations involving tens of thousands of troops, indiscriminate artillery onslaughts and aerial bombing, which has resulted in the mass exodus of Tamil civilians and the displacement of hundreds of thousands, and the blowing up of Tamil property and places of worship etc., have been taking place for years in the Northeast region of Sri Lanka. (Amateur video films depicting most of these events are available in the West.)

Have the images of these events been seen as newsworthy by the editors of the world media?

Apparently not.

Reports of 'mass graves' containing hundreds of dead bodies continue to come to light and the large scale disappearance of Tamils and raping of Tamil women by occupying Sinhalese troops, as raised repeatedly by Amnesty International, continue to take place within Tamil areas that are under military occupation.

Have these events been deemed newsworthy, or worth telling the world community about? No.

There have been countless allegations by numerous NGOs about the Sri Lankan government using food as a weapon of war in an effort to starve Tamil civilians living in rebel-controlled areas into submission. Did the world community come to know about the plight of these communities? No.

How many in the world community know about the hundreds of thousands of Tamils who have been rotting in refugee camps for years deprived of the most basic conditions of life? Not many.

The truth is that the brutal repercussions of the Colombo government's war to crush the Tamil independence struggle have been kept hidden from the world community for too long.

But then, how about the political aspect of the ethnic conflict there? Has the world media bothered to bring the efforts by many on both the Tamil and Sinhala sides to achieve peace, including big rallies and demonstrations in Colombo, to the attention of the international community? Apparently not.

The leadership of the Tamil independence struggle (the LTTE), for example, has been consistently calling for political negotiations with third party mediation, and many countries, including Nelson Mandela of South Africa, have responded positively to mediate, if invited by both

sides to the conflict.

LTTE politicians have even produced papers outlining a federal solution with power-sharing possibilities at the Center. Peace movements in Sri Lanka have welcomed such LTTE moves and there have been a number of demonstrations and rallies in Colombo expressing anti-war sentiments to promote peace talks.

The main parliamentary opposition in the country (the United National Party), too, has called on the government to restart negotiations with the Tamil leadership and blamed the government for continuing the war because of political opportunism.

So, there have been many political and social developments in Sri Lanka towards resolving the conflict.

Have any of these political and social developments, in the context of a devastating war that impoverishes millions of human beings in a small country, been of any significance to the editors of our media giants? No.

Then there have been other instances where world powers, including the UK and the US, have been assisting the Colombo administration either by selling arms or directly training the Sri Lankan military. (Incidentally, some military analysts have pointed out the United States' alleged intention to establish intelligence facilities in Sri Lanka to enable them to monitor India's activities, in return for America's assistance against the Tamil struggle.)

Were these developments of any significance to provoke interest from our media giants? Again, apparently not.

Perhaps some of the above-mentioned developments are not of international significance. But then there are many 'regional formats' within these organizations to accommodate such developments.

Why do even those regional current-affairs programmes tend to ignore such developments? After all, we are talking about global media giants whose primary responsibility is to inform their audience precisely about such events, together with analysis, aren't we?

In the Kosovo crisis we have seen – and we continue to see – how effectively the international media, with their indisputable power to shape world opinion, can bring out the sheer brutality of a genocidal war conducted by a chauvinistic regime, which is hell-bent on crushing the democratic aspirations of a minority people . . . all this, right onto our TV screens.

All major TV networks did this, in fact to the point where a military intervention by a third party to stop a humanitarian tragedy appeared “justifiable” to western audiences.

Among the many factors which determined this effective media strategy, some are quite prominent – editors and reporters alike shared similar attitudes and sentiments towards the parties to the conflict, and both held a similar perception of the political situation. Westerners generally despise Milosovic-types, who they see as remnants of the Stalinist-Communist past.

Therefore, it has been quite easy for them to ignore Milosovic's efforts to brand the KLA as merely a “bunch of terrorists.” Many have no difficulty seeing the KLA as essentially “freedom fighters.”

These sentiments, when combined with the obvious news-value of the events unfolding, produced a kind of magic which worked out very much in favor of the oppressed Kosovars.

In spite of real efforts to “balance” the war coverage by giving air time to opposing views about the conflict, the net result was to the Kosovars' favor – perhaps because the truth was on their side.

Tamils in the Sri Lankan context, unfortunately, have not been so lucky. The Colombo government is still seen in the west as a friendly democratic country.

And, at a time when the South Asia giant, India, is pursuing a fiercely independent line in relation to the development of its nuclear capabilities, the United States is extremely keen to maintain a very close relationship with Sri Lanka, which provides the west with mouth-watering facilities for intelligence activities.

Unless there is a compelling reason, moral or otherwise, for the world's media giants to encourage their reporters to cover Sri Lanka more aggressively, they are likely to continue their unofficial policy of turning a blind eye.

Does this mean that westerners necessarily fail to appreciate that leaderships like the LTTE are not terrorists but freedom fighters, in the same sense the KLA are freedom fighters? Don't they understand that the Tamils are entitled to the same right of self-determination, self-rule, etc., in the same sense the Kosovars are, and that the Sri Lankan government is, like the Milosovic regime, hell-bent in depriving them of that right?

I do not think westerners are necessarily so gullible. Western nations, indeed, have a tremendous history of national liberation struggles of their own, and they understand perfectly well what the right to self-determination is all about.

Take, for example, the separatist movement in Scotland. As a direct result of the strong Scottish independence movement, the London government was forced to constitutionally acknowledge the Scottish people's nationhood and their homeland. The London government presented a devolution package offering a Scottish parliament with wide-ranging powers, and that package was put to the Scottish people alone to ac-



cept or reject – that is, implicitly recognizing the Scottish people's right to self-determination.

And, presently the Scottish National Party is contesting in elections to the Scottish parliament with a separatist agenda in mind, and it is well known that an SNP victory is bound to create a constitutional crisis in Britain. But if the Scottish people wanted total independence, would London have any other option than to negotiate precisely that?

I ask you: could the London government even begin to contemplate sending in military forces to crush the separatist administration there? Of course not. Principles of democratic rights are too deeply embedded in the British psyche, I would say, even to think about such a course of action.

Perhaps, the maximum they could do is to negotiate further to try and secure Scottish agreement for new constitutional structures, to accommodate their independence sentiments within a united framework. But if that too fails, then nothing on earth can stop the two nations going their separate ways only to rejoin as equals through the European Union.

When Chandrika Kumaratunga says that the LTTE cannot be trusted she means that the LTTE will never change its mind on having a separate Tamil state. But the point is that the answer to the LTTE's agenda is not to unleash war but to offer a genuine democratic alternative for them to pursue their program, while she herself might use the same framework to convince the Tamils that 'keeping the marriage' in some form is mutually beneficial.

This is what the Labour government did in relation to the Scottish nationalist challenge. That is the democratic way of dealing with separatist aspirations – not war.

I believe the western mind-set is quite capa-

ble of understanding the democratic rights of the Tamil people in the same way. And most western reporters know very well that the LTTE cannot genuinely be characterized as a bunch of fanatical terrorists. Western journalists are well aware of the sufferings of the Tamil people in general, and of desperate refugees in particular. They know that what one sees in Tamil areas is a military occupation of one race by another, and nothing less. (Some have privately confessed to me that what is happening there amounts to a genocidal war.)

Well, if that is the case, how do you explain the conspicuous silence by the media giants at present? How can they ignore the brutality of the ongoing war and the suffering of hundreds of thousands of Tamil refugees? Is there a some sort of conspiracy between the Sri Lankan government, western governments and the western-based media giants?

I do not think so.

I have already given one explanation for this in terms of the existing western mind-set which perceives the independence struggles within sovereign states as the primary factor destabilizing the world order – when, in fact, it is the Milosovic-type regimes which are the real culprits.

The other explanation is much more tangible: both the editors and reporters of these TV networks have a vested interest in not antagonizing the Sri Lankan government in the same way that western governments want to maintain friendly relations with it. But the TV giants' interests are of a different nature.

Let me explain: one of the fundamental needs of the BBC, CNN and SKY is to find TV outlets for their broadcasts in our part of the world. In Sri Lanka's case they have managed to sell their product to a few TV companies

based in Colombo. But these companies, who are delighted to broadcast such internationally-prestigious programmes, have one big problem. If they broadcast anything that is damaging to the government in Colombo it can ruthlessly clamp down on them by using some excuse to cancel their license. If they want to keep their license they have to be in the government's good books.

On the one hand the Colombo TV companies want to use programmes from the BBC, CNN and SKY, but on the other hand they want to make sure that the media giants do not do anything "naughty." But surely, no prestigious broadcaster would come to an open deal involving some sort of censorship.

In order to get around this uncomfortable situation, a kind of "unofficial understanding" seems to have emerged between TV companies based in Colombo and the international TV giants, namely, to take extra care to avoid using any material that would unduly provoke the government. It is kind of an unofficial "self censorship."

Reporters, whose livelihood is dependent on the TV giants' editorial willingness to use their products, soon learn to abide by this "unofficial understanding." Also, the Colombo government knows how to "discipline" any "over-enthusiastic" foreign journalists, initially by using a few high-handed methods and finally by threatening not to extend their stay-permits. (Some honest BBC journalists are known to have gone through this experience.)

Soon, these journalists, too, learn to behave themselves rather than jeopardise their careers trying to please their consciences as professional journalists. After all, why imperil a comfortable existence in a city like Colombo by making programmes their own pay-masters are not happy to use!

Is not it more prudent to have a smooth relationship with the Colombo establishment so that they have easy access to top politicians, enabling them to produce "not too controversial" saleable programmes which do not displease anybody?

This convenient arrangement between the Colombo government, local TV companies and the world media giants seems to work quite smoothly – albeit at the expense of millions of Tamils suffering at the brunt of a brutal invasion of their homeland.

Now, the bosses of these prestigious international media companies, too, have a very interesting rationale for this unholy compromise. If they begin to use programmes that expose the true brutality of the war, like they are doing in Kosovo, then before long their channels will lose their existing ability to reach millions of Sri Lankan viewers. Isn't it better to keep Sri Lankan viewers informed at least about other important world developments? Would not that help Sri Lanka as a whole in the long run, even if the Tamil refugees suffer in the short term?

This argument may sound extremely unkind, but it can be the only possible justification for the current inaction, if justification were possible at all.

Mind you, deep-rooted journalistic traditions in the western media stop TV bosses allowing too much to be compromised either. As long as they sincerely believe that, despite all the understandable 'mistakes' the Colombo government makes, on the whole it is a democratic country trying hard to solve a difficult problem (Chandrika Kumaratunga after all is seen as trying her best to introduce a 'substantial devolution package' to solve the problem ... it is seen as mainly due to the intransigence of the Tamil Tigers that the war is dragging ... and so on) western media bosses may not have too much difficulty in

maintaining the above mentioned compromise. Hence, there is a tendency, I believe, on the part of the world media leaders, to readily subscribe to many myths disseminated by the state to cover up the fundamental democratic principles involved.

As far as I can see this is the most plausible explanation for the present lack of Sri Lankan news in the world media despite the continuation of the brutal war. A sad state of affairs indeed!

The problem is how to get round this situation.

Perhaps the newly-emerging global awareness that the international communities' moral obligation to swiftly act on humanitarian issues – even at the expense of the sovereignty of states – will, I hope, help persuade the bosses of media institutions to modify their unofficial editorial policies in relation to those countries where colossal humanitarian crises are dragging on.

They must not allow safe, convenient arrangements with such countries to affect their coverage of sensitive events within those countries.

Their moral obligation, as leaders of the world media, to expose crimes against humanity wherever they take place, and even help such countries achieve peace, is far more important than any amount of revenue and esteem they can generate through ever-increasing audiences.

They should, I believe, have the honor to do this even at the risk of jeopardizing existing contracts with various media institutions in those offending countries.

In what is a ruthless competition to grab the biggest share of the world audience for themselves, the temptation to compromise even with the devil, at the expense of honorable journalism, is unpardonable.

If the media giants believe that they might somehow be able to strike a reasonable balance

between their selfish interests and journalistic ones they are mistaken. Nasty regimes in this world are too clever for that. The more they realise the dependence of the world media on them, the more these regimes know how to increase pressure on them, until they lure the media's attention away totally from their own heinous crimes against humanity.

This is exactly what the Sri Lankan government has, I believe, done quite effectively to the BBC, CNN and SKY.

Otherwise, how could you explain the following: As I am presenting this paper, something extremely gruesome is happening in the Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka. Some twenty odd skeletons of Tamils have been dug out of a mass grave in Jaffna. And this is on top of another revelation by a Sinhalese government soldier that some 400 Tamils were killed and buried in another mass grave by the military in a village called Chemmani in the north. This grave was revealed about an year ago, and the government has still failed to locate and excavate this site, despite tremendous pressure from human rights organizations all over the world. A local MP in the eastern part of the Tamil homeland also has recently called upon the government to investigate the existence of mass graves in his constituency.

But our world media giants have yet to realize their obligation to bring these events, with adequate background analysis, to TV screens all over the world.

Compare this with the day and night coverage being given to the sufferings of Kosovars under Milosevic.

It is clear to me that, somehow, the world's media giants have failed to adequately appreciate an extremely significant phenomenon taking place in the world today – namely, stepped-up moves by the international community to act de-

cisively on humanitarian issues. As the Pinochet and the Kosovo cases demonstrate, there is an ongoing battle between 'the humanitarian imperative' and the issue of 'the sovereignty of states.' The former, at least in these two cases, has won.

Whatever the real motives of NATO's attack on Yugoslavia, and whatever the prudence of the timing and manner of the western intervention in the humanitarian crisis in the Balkans, one thing is clear: Most observers accept and believe in the Kosovars' right to self-determination, and that their homeland is real, and that the humanitarian crisis created there by a chauvinist regime (under the guise of defeating terrorism) has warranted decisive international intervention.

Whatever the differences of opinion about the wisdom of military intervention under such circumstances, there is little argument about the fundamental principles involved, and the inalienable rights of a people. And, after Kosovo, the "anti-terrorist" mantra that is energetically used by chauvinist regimes to justify oppression of ethnic communities, has virtually run out of steam.

Finally, let me point out another relevant factor that emerges from the Kosovo crisis and show how that factor strengthens my appeal to the world media giants:

As the debate over the 'justifiability of NATO attack' was raging on the TV screens some critics tried to expose NATO's 'hypocrisy' by pointing out its indifference to many other similar cases in other parts of the world. Most NATO politicians' response was to come up with pragmatic reasons which make such world-wide military interventions virtually impossible. Such reasons even sounded plausible – if one conveniently ignores the US and UK's actual military support given to the Sri Lankan government's Milosevic-

type efforts to crush the Tamil struggle.

Let us, for argument's sake, assume NATO's sincerity in raising the above-mentioned pragmatic arguments to rule out military intervention in all Kosovo-type cases, and let us turn to some western liberals' opposition to even this military attack against Yugoslavia.

These liberals, not willing to be seen to be supporting Milosevic, criticized NATO action from a different angle. Any intervention of this nature could only come through the UN's Security Council, and if it was necessary to use force to stop Milosovic at all, it should have been through a 'legitimate' UN force and not a NATO force – they argued.

Britain's foreign secretary Robin Cook replied to this argument on TV, by placing the blame on the UN's inefficiency due to its existing undemocratic structures, thereby justifying NATO action considering the enormity and urgency of the deepening humanitarian crisis.

Now, this whole debate over NATO intervention has clearly brought out at least two important issues on which world community should act.

One: Urgent steps must be taken to democratize UN structures, enabling it to act swiftly – even using force as a last resort – to discipline chauvinist regimes anywhere in the world which precipitate humanitarian catastrophes in their efforts to eradicate the freedom struggles of ethnic minorities.

Two: the importance of finding ways of effectively using UN authority in conflict resolution, giving priority to humanitarian and democratic principles rather than to the sovereignty of states, in such a way as to render military intervention unnecessary and unjustifiable.

It is in the latter case that my appeal to the world media giants becomes relevant.

Keeping the international community well-informed about all aspects of the national conflicts raging today in many parts of the world, is one of the surest ways of promoting effective, lasting, and just, conflict resolution. Perhaps It is high time the United Nations itself came up with its own television news channel dedicated to conflict resolution and peace.

**About the Author:** Mr. Vasantharaja's father is a Tamil (a doctor by profession) and his mother is a Sinhalese. He was brought up as a Sinhala Buddhist. He obtained his first degree (BA Hons.) at Peradeniya University in Philosophy. He started his professional career as an assistant lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Colombo and did his post-graduate studies at the London University (Kings College). He also did his MA in Philosophy there. He joined the BBC World Service as a producer and was in charge of the Sinhala service there for about ten years. He resigned from the BBC in 1994 in response to an invitation by the Media Ministry of the PA government to return to Sri Lanka as a media consultant to help introduce media reforms. Within a month after returning to Colombo, he was appointed as the Chairman of Sri Lanka's national state TV, during which time he introduced many reforms to the TV network. However, after the collapse of the peace talks in April 1995 the government said it was going to re-launch war and that the state media heads should back the government's war effort. He was personally asked to dismantle some of the reforms he had introduced. At this point he openly refused to do so and resigned in protest.

Mr. Vasantharaja returned to London and started working as a freelance journalist and a writer. He was the editor of *Tamil Guardian* for

a while. Based on his journalistic experiences in Jaffna during the LTTE administration, when he visited the war zone to produce programmes for the BBC in 1994, he wrote a book titled *Tamil Exodus and Beyond* in 1995.

He was part of the Sri Lankan delegation which was sponsored by the London-based International Alert (a conflict resolution NGO) to visit South Africa and Northern Ireland to learn from the peace processes there.

He has participated in, and contributed to, several international conferences on Sri Lanka's conflict, held in the UK, Australia, USA, Canada, Norway, etc.