

Sri Lanka and Myanmar: A Tale of Two Buddhist Genocides

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Good Morning!

I am really sorry that I cannot be there in person. I really wanted to but my schedule got reshuffled a bit so that I am unable to come there to Ottawa to join you and show you my solidarity in person. I have always been an admirer of the Eelam Tamil struggle for Self-Determination and Ethnic Equality in Sri Lanka and I have stood by your struggle. Even when your armed resistance was defeated, I stayed in solidarity with the Tamil people irrespective of what happened.

Nobody wants to see bloodshed and violence but that is just a small part of your struggle, as I understand it. I served as a member of the Panel of Jury in Bremen at the Permanent People's Tribunal on Sri Lanka, the second such Tribunal, that looked at the question of whether the State of Sri Lanka had committed the crime of Genocide against Eelam Tamil people, not just War Crimes. War Crimes was decided on at the First Permanent People's Tribunal in Dublin in 2012, and I was with the Second Tribunal that was held in Bremen, Germany that found the State of Sri Lanka guilty of the Crime of Genocide in addition to War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity. There I heard harrowing testimonies of people who lived through the last phase of the war, including some Canadian doctors, Tamil doctors, who went to help their people who

were trying to simply stay alive in the face of relentless and ruthless bombardment and massacres by the Sri Lankan army.

In this day and age, struggles for Self-Determination or even for ethnic equality within a single Nation-State that is ethnically controlled by usually majoritarian racist groups, whether it is in Sri Lanka by Buddhist Sinhalese, or in my own country of Burma or Myanmar where the Burmese Buddhist majority, are in sync with the Burmese military. That had been their main oppressor over the last 50 years. As you know, the Rohingya people, simply because they happen to be Rohingya and they happen to be in an area the Burmese military considers very strategic to them, they have been misframed as Islamic terrorists and supporters, and misframed as proxies for Bangladesh which the Burmese military fears may snatch the ancient Arakan coastline in order to relieve itself of population pressure from the high density of over 166 million people.

I am from a Buddhist Burmese majority background. I came from an extended military family that have served in the Burmese Armed Forces since its inception in 1942, under the fascist Japanese patronage. Although I am a Buddhist Burmese, and myself with an extensive military background, I do not go around with the blind patriotism that makes people behave like herds, behave like they are part of a pack. My country's wrong is wrong and I am not going to support that country, and therefore I have been declared an enemy of the State. I am possibly the most hated person by the Burmese racist public that calls itself Buddhist and commits and cheer leads

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a genocide against Rohingyas. I draw a parallel between this and what the Sinhalese public that calls itself Theravada Buddhist does. Our two countries, Sri Lanka or Ceylon and Burma or Myanmar, have a long centuries-old ties. Most disturbingly, these two Theravada Buddhist countries are now credibly accused of committing Crimes against Humanity, Genocide and War Crimes, which are all legally defined international crimes.

So these Buddhist societies must reclaim their good selves and they must stop any form of atrocities, the least of which is religious bigotry and State-sponsored discrimination and persecution against either Hindu or other Tamil people or the Muslim Rohingyas or Kachin Christians. The Burmese army is also committing war crimes against Christian Kachin people near the Chinese-Burmese border in the Northern most part of Burma as I speak today.

So, I think my final message is that the United Nations, starting with the Security Council and its permanent five members, has failed all the oppressed people of the world over and over again. They have turned the slogan 'never again' into an empty and poor taste joke if you belong to an oppressed minority, in a racist majoritarian post-independent but

colonial state such as Sri Lanka today, and Myanmar under Aung San Suu Kyi and the Burmese military.

So, I think that the key is we cannot look to these States that are created by us humans to come to our rescue. We must actually collaborate among the oppressed people horizontally. In other words, we must lend a hand of solidarity to whoever is in distress, whoever is not free from oppression.

Finally, I wish all struggles and resistance movements well, and as we find it necessary to keep up with our struggle, we keep on trying to re-establish broken communities as well. But, at the end of the day, we must also seek ways to reconcile with those who oppress us, whatever they are, wherever they may be. We have more in common as humans across religions, faiths, culture and national identities. So, my message is twofold. We seek to establish a solidarity movement and movements across the world, and, at the same time, we seek to retain our own humanity so that we do not become like our oppressor. At any cost, we seek reconciliation even with our oppressor when the oppressor group is ready to meet us halfway.

Thank you very much and have a wonderful Conference!